

Palestinian Leaders Exploit the Death of Shireen Abu Akleh to Spread Lies

By Ron Ben-Yishai

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Like Al Jazeera, they see only an opportunity for incitement.

Abu Akleh was a professional journalist who had been covering the Middle East for Al Jazeera for decades, and she most likely took the risks involved knowingly as well as the proper precautions.

But like many journalists before her, and unfortunately many after her, even though they are aware of the risk, they do their job knowing that a bullet, a shell, or a bomb dropped from a plane, and maybe even a knife, could end their lives, severely wound them or leave them crippled.

The helmet and protective vest I've worn many times, including recently in Ukraine, don't really shield you from death. Especially not in those cases where one of the belligerent parties shoots at you and tries to hit you in any way possible, deliberately, so you won't share the truth with the world.

The helmet and vest provide but an illusion of safety and soothe the conscience of the editors who send you to the battlefield, and the insurance companies that wish to minimize the risk of doling out huge sums of money as compensation to your grieving family. And the only thing that helps the fighting sides distinguish that you are a reporter is the word "press" printed on your vest — like it was on Shireen's.

The International Press Association reports every year about dozens of journalists who are killed in various conflict zones around the world. In an overwhelming majority of cases, it is journalists from third-world countries, some of whom work for Western media, that get the short end of the stick. But sadly, international media don't include them in the count. Only when a journalist or a photographer from a Western, democratic country dies do the media respond fiercely and condemn anyone who is so much as suspected of being involved in their untimely demise.

You never really know who shot, killed, or wounded. Only in cases of aerial bombings, like in Syria, or massive artillery shelling is it clear that the shelling and bombing side is the one responsible for the death of a journalist in the line of duty. However, no one has ever been punished for harming journalists, neither state actors nor individuals. And in some cases, there's no real culprit either.

When a journalist heads out to an active warzone, especially in an urban area, the chances of getting caught in

The Muslim Brotherhood's foreign minister

By Caroline B. Glick

Israel's government owes its survival to a hostile, anti-Semitic actor that is actively working towards its destruction.

The responses elicited by the death of Al-Jazeera

the crossfire unintentionally are high.

Such cases require an investigation in which an autopsy is performed, as well as a ballistic probe to determine which weapon was fired at the journalist. Only then will it be possible to assess who shot them and from which side.

But the Palestinians and Al Jazeera don't want the truth. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Hamas, as well as Ra'am MK Walid Taha, wish to leverage her death, which is most likely unintentional, for political and propaganda purposes, and that is why they reject any offer for an objective investigation.

Even if such an investigation is launched, they will make sure to destroy any shred of evidence that might point to the probable scenario that the Palestinian militants who were firing wantonly were the ones who killed her.

The IDF's response this time around was effective and swift and offered a reasonable alternative to the Palestinian version that claimed that the IDF was responsible for the journalist's death. The Palestinians rushed to declare the journalist a martyr because it serves the constant war of propaganda which Abbas and Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar lead against Israel.

But the IDF's version is correct: The Palestinians and Al Jazeera's assertions are grounded in nothing except deafening victimhood that is aimed at painting Israel and its security forces as the aggressor.

In previous cases, the IDF was late to the party as it sought to provide a credible version backed by evidence. There were also incidents the IDF was to blame but didn't admit to it. This time around, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit responded with a counter-narrative to the Palestinian one and it probably did the trick. Its effect on Israeli media and global news agencies was immediate. As it should be.

And as for us, the journalists who cover conflict the world over — we're allowed to demand that the risk we take to bring out the truth and the facts as they are seen from the battlefield will not be abused by cynical politicians and clerics to incite and achieve their goals, whether just or not. I believe that journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was in Jenin because she wanted to report the facts as they were. We're allowed to demand from Abbas, Al Jazeera and Ra'am to refrain from using her death to spread fake news until the facts are thoroughly examined.

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reporter Shireen Abu Akleh were written hundreds of years ago. Blood libels — the practice of using the death of non-Jews as a means to set up the Jewish collective for demonization, condemnation, ostracism, and mass murder

– may vary in their proximate details. But the substance is always the same. The Jews are guilty.

Israel has been subjected to repeated blood libels. Their details are always more or less the same. Israeli forces fight terrorists. Non-Jewish civilians die, and Israel's right to exist is rejected by "right thinking" people the world over. In the case at hand, on Tuesday night IDF forces were carrying out counter-terror operations in Jenin – the terror capital where most of the recent terror attacks were planned. Nineteen innocent Israelis have been murdered in these attacks. Tuesday night, Palestinian terrorists opened fire on the IDF forces shortly after they entered the city. In the ensuing firefight, Abu Akleh was shot. Palestinian footage indicates fairly clearly that she was killed by the terrorists.

But facts are meaningless in a blood libel. Thus all the regular actors in contemporary morality plays are reciting their lines in turn. The Arabs, the Europeans, the Americans, the UN, and most importantly the Arab and Western media are all playing their assigned roles and using Abu Akleh's death as the basis of a mass indictment of Israel's very existence.

The Abu Akleh blood libel does have one novel aspect to it. A new actor has joined the pile-on.

Ra'am, the United Arab List, is a Muslim Brotherhood political party in Israel's Knesset. Its leader Mansour Abbas fundamentally changed Israel's political realities when he broke with 73 years of convention and joined the governing coalition last year, giving it its bare majority of one vote. With his four-seat faction, Abbas controls the fate of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's and Alternate Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid's government. If he bolts, the government collapses.

Abbas presents himself as a moderate leader whose only concern is the welfare of Arab Israelis. His partnership in the coalition, he proclaims, is focused on issues like sanitation and electricity, not Arab nationalism or jihad.

Given Abbas' mild-mannered persona, Ra'am's statements following Abu Akleh's death were stunning. Ra'am responded to her death by demanding an international inquiry. Ra'am's message is not simply about virtue signaling. It is a proclamation. The party that controls Israel's government considers Israel's governing institutions – the IDF, the police, the Health Ministry, the forensic medical institute – fundamentally illegitimate. Israel, in other words, is fundamentally illegitimate. By demanding an "international investigation," Ra'am is effectively demanding that Israel surrender to the braying blood libel mob.

Ra'am's statement was not an isolated incident. It is part of its much wider use of relations with foreign governments and institutions to advance the Islamic Movement's agenda from within the Israeli governing coalition. Abbas is carrying out an active, independent foreign policy that is hostile to Israel's most fundamental national interest – the preservation of its sovereignty.

At least publicly, the focus of Abbas' diplomatic

efforts is Jordan. Since setting up the Bennett-Lapid government, Abbas has met twice with King Abdullah II of Jordan. Last November, Abdullah and Abbas met for four hours at Abdullah's palace. The regime-controlled Jordanian media gave expansive coverage of the meeting. The coverage was particularly stunning since, when Abdullah met with Bennett in the summer, he insisted that no photos be taken and that the meeting be kept secret.

Abbas' ties with Abdullah serve the interests of both men. Jordan's Islamic Waqf employs the personnel in the mosques on the Temple Mount. But over the years, the Waqf's personnel have switched their allegiance from Jordan to the PLO to the Islamic Movement and Hamas.

Whereas King Abdullah's father, the late King Hussein, viewed the Palestinians, who comprise a large majority of Jordan's population as an existential threat to the Hashemite regime, Abdullah has thrown his lot in with the Palestinians to the detriment of the Bedouin minority in Jordan. By embracing the Muslim Brotherhood through Abbas' Islamic Movement, Abdullah seeks to stabilize his grip on power at a time of economic and political instability in Jordan.

For his part, Abbas is using Abdullah, who boasts close ties to the US foreign policy establishment, the EU, and the Israeli left and security establishment as a proxy to advance the Islamic Movement's strategic goals vis-à-vis the Temple Mount and Israel as a whole.

The first unmistakable sign of the fusion of Jordan's positions with those of the Islamic Movement, (and Hamas) came in the midst of the Muslim riots during the month of Ramadan last month. On April 18, Jordanian Prime Minister Bisher Khasawneh enthusiastically supported the rioters. In a speech before the Jordanian parliament, he said, "I salute every Palestinian, and all the employees of the Jordanian Islamic Waqf, who proudly stand like minarets, hurling their stones in a volley of clay at the Zionist sympathizers defiling the Al-Aqsa Mosque under the protection of the Israeli occupation government."

A week later Abbas was back in Jordan for another four-hour meeting with Abdullah. Judging from what followed, it's clear the two men agreed on a joint policy aimed at coercing Israel into abrogating its sovereignty over Judaism's most sacred site.

Almost immediately after Abbas returned from Jordan, Abdullah submitted a list of radical – indeed, fanatical – demands regarding the future management and control of the Temple Mount to the Biden administration. The Hashemite monarch is scheduled to discuss the list at a White House meeting with President Joe Biden.

Abdullah's list contains a number of antisemitic, indeed, Islamic supremacist demands. For instance, he demands that Jews alighting to the Temple Mount abide by a Waqf-dictated dress code. Abdullah also demands that all Jews and Christians wishing to visit the Temple Mount submit a written request to the Waqf for permission. The Waqf will be the only authority with the right to permit such visits. Another demand is to strictly limit the area of

the Temple Mount where non-Muslims would be permitted to walk.

If those demands weren't bad enough, Abdullah also demands that Israeli police be barred from entering the mosques altogether. It goes without saying that if Abdullah's list of demands is even partially met, Israel's sovereignty over the Temple Mount will be a thing of the past.

Abdullah's list is already bringing rewards. Rather than tear up the bigoted document, the Biden administration is catering to it. Early this week it was reported that during Biden's scheduled visit to Israel next month, he intends to visit Al Makassed Arab hospital in eastern Jerusalem. No Israeli presence will be permitted during the course of the presidential visit. The implication is clear. Biden is the first president to openly support the abrogation of Israel's sovereignty over parts of its capital city.

That Abdullah submitted his demands to Washington immediately after he met with Abbas is proof enough that the events were linked. But Abbas dispelled any residual doubt when he announced last weekend that Ra'am's position on the Temple Mount is Jordan's position. Abbas further stated that Ra'am is conditioning its continued support for the Bennett-Lapid government on the government's willingness to set up a joint Israeli-Jordanian committee to discuss Abdullah's demands. In other words, Bennett and Lapid must agree to negotiate Israel's sovereignty over the Temple Mount if they wish to keep their jobs.

Jordan apparently is not the only foreign country where Abbas operates. Earlier this week, Channel 14's Yaara Zered reported that Abbas spent several days in Turkey last week. Details of the trip are sparse. But what is clear enough is that as the deputy head of the Southern Branch of the Islamic Movement, Abbas had plenty of things to do in Turkey.

Last December, Ad Kan, an Israeli NGO that penetrates radical Israeli NGOs to expose their subversive activities, published an investigative report exposing the Southern Branch of the Islamic Movement's ties with Hamas. Most of the movement's cooperative efforts with the terrorist organization are carried out by its NGOs. These groups in turn are led by senior members of the Islamic movement, including senior Ra'am party officials. Beyond their operations in Israel, Gaza, Judea and Samaria, a focal point for the organization's activities is Turkey.

US President Joe Biden and Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan on the sidelines of the G20 leaders' summit in Rome, Italy October 31, 2021 (Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)

Abolish Nakba Day

By Bassam Eid

Palestinians would be better served by celebrating freedom than by nourishing grievance.

Who in the Middle East has not been traumatized by the upheavals of the last century? All of us celebrate the history of our families and treasure the places where we have lived, yet only the Palestinian leadership has

For instance, a key Hamas-tied NGO controlled by the Islamic Movement is the Igatha 48 Association. Igatha 48 Association is led by senior members of Ra'am. The group has close ties with Turkish NGOs that are directly and indirectly tied to Hamas and to the Islamist regime of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The Ad Kan report showed that Igatha 48 Association cooperates closely with Al Furkan, a Turkish NGO openly supportive of Hamas. Al Furkan members have joined the ranks of al-Qaida and Islamic State. One Al Furkan member was arrested by Turkish authorities for planning an attack on US soldiers at Incirlik Air Force base in Turkey. Igatha 48 Association and Al Furkan jointly constructed a town for Syrian refugees on the Syrian side of the Syrian-Turkish border.

Igatha 48 Association is also a member of the Turkish "Union of the Islamic World's NGOs." The union is a coalition of Islamic groups, several of which have been outlawed by the US and Israel for their ties to Hamas. The Ad Kan report revealed that the union closely coordinates its activities with the Turkish regime.

Ahead of the first anniversary of the Arab Israeli riots in mixed Arab-Jewish cities during Operation Guardian of the Walls last May, the Israel Defense and Security Forum, (Habithonistim) published the results of a poll regarding public faith in law enforcement, and Arab Israeli views of the state. During the Arab riots, Arab Israeli mobs carried out pogroms in Acre, Lod, and other mixed cities. They lynched Jews and torched Jewish homes, cars, synagogues and businesses. Among the poll's many alarming findings, it found that 75% of Arab Israelis reject Israel's right to exist.

In light of the data and in this combustible atmosphere, Ra'am's efforts to use the international community on the one hand, and its ability to bring the government down on the other, to coerce Israel into abrogating its sovereignty over the Temple Mount must be seen as a continuation by other means of last year's Arab Israeli mob violence.

Abbas' initial meeting with Abdullah last November exposed Ra'am's claim that it is simply interested in improving the living conditions of Arab Israelis as a bald-faced lie. And now, Ra'am is using its political power and international position to endanger Israel's ties with the US and its regional partners and to imperil its sovereignty over Jerusalem.

Ra'am's participation in the Abu Akleh blood libel then should come as no surprise. Today Israel's government owes its survival to a hostile, antisemitic actor, actively working towards its destruction.

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weaponized the memory of displacement and transformed it into an ideology of genocide. "Nakba Day," which occurs every year on May 15, was established in 1998 by former Palestinian Authority leader—and international

terrorist mastermind—Yasser Arafat to turn Israel's Independence Day into a festival of grievance. The very fact of Israel's existence was branded a “catastrophe”—nakba in Arabic—but not the displacement that affected both sides in the subsequent war, which included the ethnic cleansing of all Jews from what became the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem. And during and after Israel's War of Independence in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Jews were expelled from Arab lands; that is, in fact, the true nakba.

In the war in what had been British Mandatory Palestine, Jewish communities were uprooted and expelled from their homes in Gush Etzion and Atarot in the modern-day West Bank by the British-commanded Transjordanian Arab Legion. The ancient Jewish community of Hebron, where the Cave of the Patriarchs—burial site of the biblical forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—is located, had already been pushed out by a 1929 Arab riot and prevented from returning by the British authorities.

Baghdad was one-third Jewish in the early 20th century, and like the Temple Mount today, there were many sites there that were shared by both Jewish and Muslim worshippers, such as the Prophet Ezekiel's Tomb in al-Kifl, home for centuries to both a mosque and a synagogue. In 1941, during the brief Nazi-backed coup led by Rashid Ali al-Gailani, an anti-Semitic mob was allowed to murder and rape members of Baghdad's Jewish community in a pogrom called the Farhud. Iraq also persecuted its Jewish community after Israel's independence and, by 1951, Israel had rescued by airlift almost the entire Iraqi Jewish population in “Operation Ezra and Nehemiah.”

The Jewish community in Yemen was also rescued by the embryonic Jewish state in 1948-49, within a year of Israel's independence, in “Operation Wings of Eagles.” According to legend, many Yemenite Jews had never even seen an airplane before and took them as a literal fulfillment of the biblical promise that “they that wait for the Lord ... shall mount up with wings as eagles” (Isaiah 40:31).

In all, more than 850,000 Jews were forced to flee Arab countries for Israel, followed by more than 70,000 Jews from Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Like Iraq, Iran was home to multi-confessional sites honored by both faiths, such as Queen Esther's Tomb in Hamadan, Iran. On “Nakba Day” 2020, a vandal set parts of the shrine on fire in a probable hate crime.

The Arab world has seen more displacement than almost any other region, as modern refugee populations from Iraq and Syria can attest. Although my family is

Muslim, I was born in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, then under Jordanian control. In 1966, when I was 8 years old, the Jordanian government moved my family north of Jerusalem to the Shuafat Refugee Camp. It was the government of Jordan, not the government of Israel, that made me a refugee.

The difference between a Palestinian culture taught to celebrate grievance and an Israeli culture that idealizes freedom is stark. The Christian minority population, for example, has plummeted in Palestinian Authority-controlled territory. In Bethlehem, it has dropped from 84% to 22% in the last decade alone. Meanwhile, a party with Islamic foundations has a critical role in Israel's current government, and Israel's Supreme Court recently appointed its first Muslim justice, Khaled Kabub.

Palestinians should celebrate our rich heritage and, like our Jewish cousins, grieve our losses. But now is the time for negotiated reconciliation, not the perpetuation of generation-old victimhood. “Nakba Day” is part of the victimhood problem, not part of the forward-looking solution. Reconciliation happens only when both sides take a step back and acknowledge joint suffering. “Nakba Day” does the reverse. Whereas Israel has three times offered Palestinians peace, dignity and independence, Yasser Arafat launched—and Mahmoud Abbas has failed to contain—the violent public culture of the 2000-05 Second Intifada, for which the 1998 establishment of “Nakba Day” can be understood as a buildup.

The fetishization of Israel's very existence as a catastrophe is a distortion that wounds our children and leads them to war and suicide bombing. Nearly 1 million Jews in Islamic lands faced their own Nakba after Israel's independence. Perhaps if more Palestinians understood this, we would better understand our Israeli neighbors.

We must teach our children about our neighbors, seek understanding and champion peace. The Palestinian leadership should reverse course on the incitement against Israel and Jews—including the spread of anti-Semitic stereotypes—in public education and media. Instead, Palestinian schoolchildren and citizens should learn the history, the joys and the traumas of our neighbors the Israelis, with whom we have a great deal in common. In so doing, we can lay the foundations of a new Middle East, and cities like my native Jericho in the Jordan Valley can blossom as hubs of international cooperation and commerce. This can only be achieved if we learn to understand our neighbors' grief, not exacerbate our own.

“Nakba Day” does the opposite and should be abolished.

Mr. Eid is a Palestinian human-rights activist, political analyst and journalist.

What the War in Ukraine Means for Iran, Israel, and Syria

By Alma Research and Education Center

israel-alma.org

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The “war between the wars” goes on.

Until the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Syria was the

most extensive arena the Russian military was deployed permanently. Nevertheless, Russia will not abandon the

Syrian arena, which it considers a strategic arena, leaving it in the hands of the Iranians. Before the outbreak of war in Ukraine (February 24, 2022), the Russian military force in Syria consisted of around 10,000 soldiers in 12 bases (two main ones: Tartus and Hmeimim, and ten smaller ones) and various assorted field outposts. As of now, it is not clear whether, in light of the war in Ukraine, Russia has substantially reduced the number of troops in Syria and transferred them to fight in Ukraine. It is clear that Russian forces have been transferred from Syria to Ukraine, but the extent of the forces redeployed is not clear to us.

With the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and in the days and weeks that followed, the Russians seemed to have gone to great lengths to exhibit “business as usual” and were not neglecting their activities in Syria. There is a Russian trend towards an increased “marketing” perception of their activities in Syria. The “marketing” is both in the context of military activity and civilian-humanitarian activity vis-à-vis the population.

Israel faces two challenges within the framework of the Russian presence in Syria. The main Israeli challenge stems from the deployment of Russian soldiers throughout Syria while implementing the Campaign Between Wars (CBW) activity without physically harming Russian soldiers and interests. The second challenge stems from the war in Ukraine and the redirection of Russian attention there. Before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the Russians actually sought to achieve momentum at the expense of the Iranians in the race for influence in Syria. However, there is no “vacuum” in the Middle East, even for a moment, i.e., elements of the radical Shiite axis led by Iran immediately take advantage of Russia’s attention-turning to Ukraine and try (and succeed) to achieve accomplishments over the Russians in the race for influence in Syria. Such achievements come at Israel’s expense and harm Israeli

Muslim-American delegation visits Israel, UAE in support of Abraham Accords

By David Isaac

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Battles with high-profile Pakistani politicians aside, for most of the group, in Israel for the first time, the visit was an eye-opening experience.

A 14-member delegation of mainly Muslim-Americans of Pakistani background were in Israel from May 8-14 to show support for the 2018 Abraham Accords between Israel and several Muslim states. The 10-day trip to both Israel and the United Arab Emirates generated both positive and negative publicity. Graciously received by top Israeli officials, including President Isaac Herzog, the delegation was attacked by Pakistani government ministers and senators on social media.

The trip was hosted by Sharaka, a group seeking to strengthen the Abraham Accords by bringing together young Israeli and Gulf leaders. It was organized in partnership with the American Muslim & Multifaith Women’s Empowerment Council (AMMWEC), a U.S. group that describes itself as “empowering Muslim women” and confronting “bigotry in all its forms.”

“The main message of this delegation is to combat the

interests.

If Russia should become “unsatisfied” with the Israeli CBW’s (Campaign Between Wars) activity in Syria in particular and with Israeli policy in general (also in the context of the war in Ukraine), its response poses a challenge for Israel. The Russian responses can be conveyed, as we have already expressed in our assessment in the past, in the passing on of preliminary intelligence regarding Israeli attack intentions to the Syrians and/or Iranians, after-the-fact publicity regarding the details of an Israeli attack, the transfer of advanced conventional weapons to the Syrians (S-300 air defense batteries for example) and “turning a blind eye” when conventional Russian advanced weapons are transferred from Syria to elements of the radical Shiite axis led by Iran, with an emphasis on Hezbollah (as was done with the Sa17 / SA22 / OSA air defense batteries and highly likely also the Yahunt missiles). In addition, scenarios of lower likelihood in the figure of a direct threat on IDF forces on Syrian soil should be taken into account, emphasizing threats to the Israeli Air Force.

Israel needs to set the rules of the game in the region. The countries on Israel’s northern border should be considered one arena, and Israel should establish a central rule: any threat to Israel’s security will be met with an independent response from Israel, and the other “players” should take this into account. On their part, they need to manage their risks concerning this Israeli principle.

In the Middle East, everything is connected; sometimes, the interests of opposite sides become common interests. On the one hand, the Israeli CBW serves the Russians in their race for influence against Iran in Syria. On the other hand, the Russian presence in Syria serves Israeli interest by pushing the radical Shiite axis led by Iran out of Syria.

misconceptions that exist about Israel,” Anila Ali, founder of AMMWEC and a board member of Sharaka, told JNS during a tour of Israel’s north, including the Druze village of Daliyat al-Carmel, Haifa and Nazareth.

“Since the beginning of the Abraham Accords, my organization has always supported the idea of Arabs and Israelis coming together, people to people, for economic collaboration and for the benefit of future generations,” she said.

The trip’s profile was raised when the group was welcomed to the President’s Residence in Jerusalem by Herzog and sharply criticized in Pakistan. Ali herself was attacked on Twitter by Shireen Mazari, a Pakistani politician and former federal minister for human rights, who bizarrely accused Ali of being part of a U.S. plot to change Pakistan’s regime.

Former Pakistani senator Mushtaq Ahmad Khan, a member of an Islamist political party, focused his criticism on Islamabad-based journalist Ahmed Quraishi, who was accompanying the delegation. In a May 11 tweet, Khan

posted a picture of the Sharaka delegation in Jerusalem with Quraishi circled in red, accusing him of being a Pakistani state employee, an attempt to smear the current government.

Quraishi denied any connection to Pakistan's government and told JNS that populist, conspiracy-laden attacks were unfortunately all too typical of Pakistani politics.

Battles with high-profile politicians aside, for most of the group, in Israel for the first time, the visit was an eye-opening experience.

"They had a lot of biases, not about the Jewish people, but about Israel, because it's demonized as devouring the Palestinians," said Ali. "And that's changed. Now you talk to them and they say, 'Why didn't the Palestinians accept these offers?' They have come to understand that the Jewish people in Israel want peace."

"I wanted them to feel what I experienced during my first trip," she said. During her first visit three years ago, Ali toured Israel and the Palestinian Authority, meeting Palestinian leaders like Hanan Ashrawi. Ali said she was struck at how similar the attitudes of the Palestinians were to those of some of the women she helps through AMMVEC, noting that the women who complained about the past behavior of their husbands and remained stuck in the past couldn't move forward. The Palestinians, too, are stuck looking backwards, nursing their grievances against Israel, she said.

Ali called the trip "groundbreaking," noting that Muslim-majority groups aren't touring Israel, something she wants to change. "I think this is going to be a trailblazing tour because all these people will go back and they will share what they've seen. We're going to do a lot of social media and we're going to invite people to come again with Sharaka and see for themselves and learn," she said.

One member of the delegation, Mahmood Mushtaq, who grew up in Pakistan and lives in Houston, told JNS that what he has found in Israel was "totally unexpected." He said he had learned about Israel from the media and heard only about "the repression of the Palestinians, the lack of stability, but all these things I had heard, it was totally wrong," he said. "The people I've met are friendly. They don't have any prejudice against anybody. Nobody's saying, 'Oh, you're not Jewish.' Nobody's taking potshots at you."

"And as a matter of fact, if you come to think of it, from the personal accounts I've heard, and also, after visiting Yad Vashem [Israel's Holocaust Memorial], I can well understand that security has got to be the main concern for the Jewish people," he said.

Mushtaq, who worked in the oil industry, and as a result became familiar with several Muslim countries, said that the key to the success of the Abraham Accords will be Saudi Arabia. "Not only because Saudi Arabia is a financial power in the Muslim world, and funds the economies of

many Muslim countries, including Pakistan, but also because it is the custodian of the two holiest places of Islam," he said.

Fishel Benkhald, one of the only publicly recognized Jews in Pakistan, who lives in Karachi, was also on the trip. A civil engineer by training, who works for the Star-K, a kosher-certification agency, he sported a black yarmulke held by Star of David pins.

He told JNS that to say he "supports" the Abraham Accords doesn't do it justice. "It's much deeper. It's going to affect our children, not only the children of Arabs inside of the Middle East, but those of Muslims who are born and raised in Western countries," he said.

"It has got to be successful," he said, noting that what should be considered a localized Israeli-Palestinian dispute has grown to obsess the entire Muslim region. "Sitting in Pakistan, hundreds of miles away from the Middle East, from Israel, and from the Palestinians, it affects me. This industry of creating outrage is spilling out into my home, back there in Pakistan."

"Pakistani culture did not have anti-Semitism in its DNA. It was brought in later when the State of Israel was created," said Benkhald, adding that he believes the speeches given in Arabic against Israel were simply translated and repeated word for word in Pakistan, through all too-successful media and religious appeals to Muslim solidarity.

"Whenever a person is dehumanizing a certain group of people based on race, religion or creed, after a couple of years, no matter how rational you are, no matter how logical you're trying to be, you will start having the thought in the back of your mind that there's something to it. That is human nature," he said.

Benkhald sees the Abraham Accords as a chance to break the stranglehold the Israel-Palestine conflict has had up until now on regional politics. He said the UAE and Pakistan have long-held wide-ranging relations and the UAE has influence in his country.

He argues that it's in Pakistan's interest to have relations with Israel, given the latter's technological prowess, noting that his country is threatened with drought and could learn from Israel's advances. "Eighty percent of our water, due to lack of infrastructure, we are just throwing it away into the sea. That's eight-zero. That's a lot for a population of 220 million people," he said.

Although Pakistan and Israel don't have official diplomatic relations, Benkhald managed to obtain permission to visit the Jewish state. He argued that freedom of religion is in Pakistan's constitution, and as such he has the right to visit Jerusalem, the holiest site in his religion.

"I have an obligation to uphold my constitution and, and for that, I'm willing to fight. I'm not only serving the higher purpose of the Abraham Accords, but I'm also serving the higher purpose of supporting my country by supporting the supremacy of my constitution. I'm getting

two birds with one stone, or maybe better to say, two friends by offering one cup of coffee,” he said.

“And so, here I am in Israel, on a Pakistani passport,” he added. “And it is known in Pakistan, and I’m going back there with my head held high and nothing to hide.”

A day before heading to the airport on May 14 to

begin the UAE leg of their trip, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, passed away. Once in Dubai, the Sharaka delegation attended a memorial organized by the city’s Jewish community to express their condolences and demonstrate solidarity with the UAE.

When Palestinians Look to the Future, What Do They See?

By Danielle Pletka

thedispatch.com

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Palestinian pessimism might help explain the recent uptick in terror attacks.

Seven terrorist attacks in the last six weeks have left 19 Israelis dead. Some attacks were beyond gruesome, with the attacker wielding an ax. Others were shootings in crowded city cafes. In one attack, a man shielded his fiancée and died in the act. In another, a teen girl was motivated by the death of her boyfriend to stab a Jew. Israeli authorities expect the terror wave, the worst in many years, to continue. The perpetrators have all been arrested or killed, but Israeli authorities expect there are more to come.

Experts agree that there is no one theme, no one group that can claim responsibility. Hamas, the U.S.-designated terrorist group that governs Gaza, celebrated each murder, but the Jerusalem government hasn’t fingered the group for plotting attacks. ISIS took credit for another. In the United States, these might be called “lone-wolf” killings, though the presence of so many terrorist groups around Israel—Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, and ISIS, all generically promoting violence—renders the label pointless. To the dead, sponsorship is not really the point. So what’s behind the uptick in killings?

Some have fingered Palestinian anomie, or worse yet, Sunni anomie: losing wars, terrible leaders, failed battles for supremacy, democracy, everything. Others have blamed Ramadan, the Islamic holy month, traditionally (though hardly Quranically) a time of increased violence. Traditionalists have cast the Israelis as the villain, with heavy handed interventions on the Temple Mount in the wake of Palestinian violence and the usual tension between Arabs and Jews. Still others have harked back to the Sheikh Jarrah controversy—a mundane Jerusalem housing matter that escalated into a symbolic battle for ownership of Jerusalem. It contributed to last year’s 11-day war and tensions are still simmering. Many also believe that increased incitement over social media, including Telegram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and other platforms has encouraged young men to kill. It will be worth keeping an eye on whether the shooting death of Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh on Thursday will inflame tensions further. Akleh was killed while IDF forces were exchanging gunfire with armed Palestinians near the Jenin refugee camp, though it’s unclear whether her death was caused by IDF or Palestinian fire.

If all of this feels like the same story, different day, in

the endless Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there’s a reason for that. The so-called peace process is done for, with even the Democratic Biden administration—normally a haven for peace processors—preoccupied with inflation, immigration, crime, Russia, Ukraine, China, Taiwan, everything but the Middle East. A proposed visit by the president to East Jerusalem, once (and perhaps again) home to a U.S. consulate and de facto “embassy” to Palestine, is unlikely to shake things up.

A smarter approach by the United States would look at the topography of the Palestinian people and think more clearly about how to address their problems rather than falling back on the two-state solution as the answer to everything. First, what do Palestinians believe? Fine work by both the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and veteran Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki lay bare part of the trouble. Almost half of Palestinians polled believe “armed struggle” is the solution to their problems. Fully 58 percent oppose a two-state solution; 70 percent oppose “unconditional return to negotiations with Israel”; almost as many oppose dialogue with the United States. Most troubling of all, “73% believe the Qur’an contains a prophecy about the demise of the state of Israel; but only 32% think the year for this demise is 2022.” Yikes, “only” 32 percent (and it’s already May!).

Pre-pandemic crowdsourced polling done by the Washington Institute indicated an almost across-the-board trend among Palestinians toward more pessimism about the future, less realistic aspirations for victory in conflict, increased commitment to the return of all “historically Palestinian” lands, and diminished support for a two-state solution. While support for a new mass uprising or intifada was also low (for a variety of reasons, including lack of confidence in Palestinian leadership), there remained an overall commitment to violent means.

Another source of trouble is the Palestinian economy: Vulnerable before COVID and uniquely dependent on foreign assistance, Palestinians endured a dramatic economic downturn, job losses and a continued contraction of aid inflows—per the World Bank from “27% of GDP in 2008 to 1.8% in 2021.” There has been some post-COVID recovery, with the unemployment rate reportedly “bouncing back” to around (a still unfathomable) 25 percent in the West Bank and Gaza, though it is likely substantially higher in Gaza. Among younger people, the story is starker: In 2020, 42 percent of young (15-24) Palestinians were unemployed.

How has this happened? Aid programs out the wazoo, cash transfers from Gulf countries straight into the coffers of both the West Bank and Gaza governments, liberalized Israeli work permits and greater engagement with the Palestinian leadership

... and still, 19 dead in six weeks. Sure, the aid has declined over the last two decades, and more conservative Israeli governments have had harsher policies, permitted more settlement activity, and enforced more stringent border closures. But the Palestinians themselves deserve some agency. And the answer is perhaps less complex than some wish to believe.

There is violence because there is incitement to violence. There is organic hatred toward Israel and Jews for historic and current policy reasons to be sure, but there is also unending political encouragement and glorification of killing (though Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas condemned several of the recent attacks). There is a loss of faith in democratic self-government because the Palestinian Authority has not conducted a presidential election in 22 years. There is a loss of faith in the peace process because it has not delivered peace. There is rising unemployment because of failed leadership and corruption.

As we have detailed on these pages before, there is a growing sense among Palestinians that they are being left behind by history. Israel has made peace with four Arab states in the last two years, and will likely ink additional agreements before too long—with or without encouragement from Washington. “Palestine” the cause has lost its luster among all but the most extreme of governments. Should it be any surprise that without work, without economic security, without political and civil society, and with incessant governmental encouragement to kill and glorification of murder, young men turn to violence? It doesn’t excuse it, but it helps to explain it.

To keep Israel safe, it is time to break the walls

By Yoav Ende

blogs.timesofisrael.com

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We must see things as they are, instead of how we would like them to be; we must seek compromise, out of respect for each of Israeli society’s many diverse parts.

One year after the harsh events of May 2021, as some of the most violent riots rocked Israeli Arab society during operation Guardians of the Wall, it is important we have a clear view of what is before us — because, with the way things are, obliviousness is a risky proposition. Those events rocked Jewish-Arab relations in Israel; it is unclear if we are back to the way things were, but it is apparent that the distrust and animosity between our populations have grown deeper. The crisis we have all experienced was tremendous, and its repercussions are here to stay. We can choose to keep quiet, but we cannot afford to forget.

I suppose congratulations are in order to Yahya Sinwar, the leader of the Hamas movement in Gaza, for succeeding to bridge the Strip to Jerusalem — inciting

In the case of Salafi-jihadis, the United States government understands that defeat is the prelude to extinguishing groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS (though current U.S. policy is another story). In the case of Hamas, PIJ, and even those within the Palestinian Authority who incite terror, however, defeat seems to be off the playbook. The United States makes little effort to unseat or even destabilize the terror group holding the reins of power in Gaza, and still less to corral others like PIJ. Sanctions do little to stem the flow of cash from Iran and others. There is scant messaging about the need for fresh leadership, and almost no serious efforts on the part of the United States or Europe to dislodge President-for-life Mahmoud Abbas.

Similarly, there is occasional bleating from concerned politicians about incitement and social media glorification of violence, but little serious effort to quash, for example, the use of Facebook to encourage terrorism. There was also once a time when the United States prioritized the imperative of economic reform in the Palestinian Authority, putting some real muscle behind former Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, but even that has fallen largely by the wayside (or perhaps this embarrassing “roadmap” put out by USAID is incorrect?).

Israel can do more to mitigate some of the immediate economic problems among the Palestinians, but it has neither the leverage nor the the power with Palestinian leaders that is required for real change.

One option is simply to let the Palestinian people wither on the vine, and tolerate the loss of a few dozen Israelis every year to terrorist attacks. Another is to allow “Palestine” to become another Iran, a nexus for greater violence in the Middle East along the lines of Lebanon or Syria. But the better choice is to re-engage on the basis of reality, and seek to loosen the grip of crooks, killers and extremists, look to discredit their failed rule, search and support a new and better generation of leaders and help the Palestinian people find a better path.

violent clashes around the city through cynically using the holy month of Ramadan overlapping with Israel’s 74th day of independence. The air feels explosive, despite the mundanities of everyday life and the most moderate and peace-seeking majorities. This is the context of the May 2021 events one year later, but we cannot let them dictate how we go forward. We must stop and consider, together – what we have to do to live together, side by side, in partnership; how we create a joint vision of the society we wish to build. Neither Jews nor Arabs are about to disappear from this land, and we must understand that refusing to recognize this fact only worsens the situation for all of us.

The responsibility to recognize and engage with this fact does lie on all of us, but it has greater weight as it is placed on the shoulders of our heads of state and local government. I hope they too see the dangers inherent in the increasing tension, discrimination, and anger in Israeli

society; and that they also look to the future with hope and take on the role to lead our society in a better direction. I myself live in the Galilee, in Israel's north. My region has half a million Jews residing in it, alongside just over one million non-Jewish residents. One of the greatest ambitions my friends here and I have is to create an Israeli identity that both these populations can share, and, over our time living here, we have tried to weave a thread of partnership into the region's fabric of life — something Israeli society as a whole might one day be inspired by.

Sharon Asman, the IDF commander of the famous Nahal brigade who died of a heart attack at the young age of 42, wrote: "When we are afraid, hundreds of thoughts run through our heads, forming dozens of words but leading to a single action. When we love, we perform hundreds of actions, say dozens of words, but are left with but a single thought. We fear and love at the same time — we love our children and grandchildren, and we fear that they will grow in a society of blood spilled in vain."

What Are Harvard Students Taught About Israel?

By Moshe Phillips

algemeiner.com

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Much has been written about the recent endorsement of BDS by the editors of The Harvard Crimson, the Harvard student newspaper. But how do you suppose Harvard students got that way? Could it have anything to do with the professors who are teaching them about Israel?

Let's consider Derek J. Penslar, who is Harvard's William Lee Frost Professor of Jewish History. His areas of specialty are the history of Zionism and Israel, as well as related topics in modern Jewish history.

Penslar, who happens to be Jewish, has been very successful in his academic career. He has had a string of prestigious named professorships — first at Indiana University, and then at the University of Toronto, before moving up to Harvard. He has published books with prominent academic presses, and articles in well-known scholarly journals. He serves on the editorial boards of several Israel-related academic journals. He is frequently interviewed by the news media and invited to lecture at various Jewish institutions.

All these credentials give us a sense of professor Penslar's prominence in his field. But what exactly does he think about Israel? What does he teach his students? What message does he convey when he speaks to the Jewish community?

In an interview with London's Jewish Chronicle on March 14, 2013, Penslar said: "What happened to the Palestinians [in 1948] wasn't genocide. It was ethnic cleansing."

That's a lie. Israel didn't commit genocide, and it didn't commit ethnic cleansing. There was no mass murder of the Arabs. There was no mass expulsion of the Arabs.

There is no internationally accepted legal definition of ethnic cleansing, so I'll use the one posted on the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: "The

These lines should ring in our heads like a bell, like a siren. Our ears should be deafened by them, springing us into action. We must work together to create a society built on trust, on deep and meaningful relations that demand change from ourselves and each other. We must be brave and see how things truly are, instead of how we would like them to be; we must seek compromise, out of recognition and respect for each of Israeli society's many diverse parts.

Escapism is cute when we are young; but in maturity, a maturity reached after many trials and tribulations, escapism indicates an unsound mind. The sages said that while the candle is lit, repairs may yet be made. There are those out there who would like to extinguish its light. Woe unto us if, through apathy, we bring the darkness on ourselves.

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forced removal of an ethnic group from a territory ... The practice of ethnic cleansing may constitute genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes."

Israel didn't do any of those things. Not in 1948. Not in 1967. Not ever.

Penslar wrote last year that "Israel bears its share of responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem in 1948 and for subsequent Arab-Israeli wars." Nonsense. Israel is not to blame for the refugee problem; the Arab regimes that invaded Israel in 1948 are to blame. Israel is not to blame for the Arab wars against it; the Arabs who launched those wars are to blame. Israel's pre-emptive strikes against Arab regimes that were preparing to invade were not acts of aggression; they were self-defense.

Penslar wrote last year: "Israel and the Palestinian territories are a welter of ill-fitting political elements — statehood and occupation, autonomy and settlement enclaves — that perpetuate oppression, resistance, and hatred."

I know it's annoying when academics write like this, using convoluted language that has to be deciphered like some code. Still, it's obvious that when Penslar is talking here about "oppression," he's not saying the Palestinians oppress Israel, he's saying that Israel oppresses them. When Penslar refers to "resistance," he's referring to Palestinian terrorism against Israel. (I'll set aside his reference to "hatred," since in theory it could be interpreted either way.)

In a book review in The Forward on October 8, 1999, Penslar said the author of the book was "on firm factual ground when he argues that post-1967 Palestinian terrorism was waged primarily by splinter groups that were not part of the PLO mainstream."

Could Penslar really be so ignorant as to believe such a

blatantly untrue statement? Does he really not know now that many post-1967 terrorist attacks were openly claimed by the “mainstream” PLO, under Yasser Arafat’s leadership? Does he really still believe the pathetic fiction that “Black September” was not part of the PLO mainstream, even though its leaders all long ago admitted to it being a PLO front? Indeed, not too long after these remarks, the PLO mainstream — via its largest component, Fatah — launched a wave of suicide bombings against Israel.

So why do many Harvard students see Israel as a perpetrator of ethnic cleansing, and an aggressor against the Palestinian Arabs? Why do many Harvard students see Palestinian massacres of Israelis as “resistance” instead of terrorism? Why do many Harvard students excuse

mainstream Palestinian Arab terrorism by pretending that the mainstream PLO leadership is not to blame?

I’m not saying that professor Penslar is single-handedly responsible for the spread of anti-Israel attitudes on campus, or the mindset that led to the Harvard Crimson newspaper endorsing BDS in late April. But there is, in all likelihood, a connection between what Harvard professors teach and what Harvard students believe.

Academic freedom ensures the right of professors to teach whatever they want, including lies about Israel engaging in “ethnic cleansing.” But parents, students, and activists also have a right to know — and to fight back with the truth.

Mr. Phillips a US delegate to the 38th World Zionist Congress in 2020. The views expressed are his own.

Pilgrims return to Meron for downsized event, a year after crush that killed 45

By Michael Horovitz and Judah Ari Gross

timesofisrael.com

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Worshippers returned to Mount Meron on Wednesday night for Lag B’omer celebrations, a year after 45 people were killed in a deadly crush that was the worst civil disaster in Israeli history.

Minor clashes were reported between guards and extremists who threatened to break into the area around the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai on the mountain, during the downsized annual event. Ahead of the event several pilgrims were arrested after being found with sabotage equipment, apparently aiming to derail the efforts to limit the event.

Approximately 8,000 policemen were deployed to the area around the tomb to ensure the safety of attendees.

Thousands of pilgrims descended on Mount Meron for ceremonies marking the anniversary of the rabbi’s death some 19 centuries ago.

Pilgrims held a special memorial ceremony for the victims trampled to death last year, lighting candles and reading out their names to somber music, ahead of the lighting of the main Lag B’Omer bonfire.

Reporters at the scene said order was being maintained, despite expected large crowds and new rules. Some attempting to enter the site with timed tickets were told they must wait until their ticket was valid, leading to some crowding and confusion at the entrance, Channel 13 news reported.

Inside the compound, crowds were significantly smaller than in years past. “It’s empty inside,” complained one pilgrim, who said he had traveled four hours from Jerusalem, but only was allowed inside the tomb site for 30 seconds.

The head of the Boyan Hassidic sect then lit the ceremonial bonfire. Following the lighting, a klezmer band launched into a medley of classic tunes, most about the mystical Bar Yochai, who is believed to have died on Lag B’Omer and instructed his followers to celebrate the

anniversary of his death.

Authorities have instituted several safety measures meant to avoid a repeat of last year. Entrance to the site has been limited to 120,000 people altogether, with only 16,000 allowed in the tomb compound at any given time, though questions have been raised about enforcement of the cap. The format of the event has also changed, with one large bonfire replacing six slightly smaller ones lit in years past.

The government has also fixed stairs and other infrastructure around the compound to boost safety.

In addition, buses leaving ultra-Orthodox cities on Wednesday were checked by police for tickets to the event.

Bus driver Oded told Channel 12 that the event seemed to be proceeding as planned. “On the face of it, everything seems to be going well,” he said, but added that “it is too early to judge.”

A Netanya resident speaking to Walla said he was going to the event, despite knowing some of last year’s victims and having lingering fears over safety.

“The pictures from there don’t calm me, I’m not sure the [walkways] will handle all the people,” he was quoted saying. “120,000 people is a ton, and also, there will be more than 120,000.... It’s a huge privilege to come here and pray. I’m coming despite everything.”

At one barricade at the entrance to the site, dozens of men and women grumbled as police officers and private security guards blocked their entrance due to the complex being at full capacity.

“I was here last year. Trust me, it’s not worth it. Just wait and as soon as we can let you in, we will. Please don’t fight us,” one officer told those waiting.

One responded, accepting Siso’s request, albeit with what could be seen as a tacit threat. “There are dozens of us here. If we wanted to, we could send this barricade flying. We’re not doing that,” he said.