



AJDS Newsletter

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The Australian Jewish Democratic Society

April 2009

Living as a minority

There is not much to be thankful for in Avigdor Lieberman's electoral success. But in shining the torch on issues relating to Israel's Palestinian-Arab minority, he has done us all a favour. Few aspects serve to highlight the nature of a state than the way it treats its minorities.

That Arabs are discriminated against in Israel, both formally and informally, will not come as a surprise for readers of this *Newsletter*. But even those of us who pay close attention to the subject do not realise just how deep is the malaise, something I realised when I visited Israel last year.

Here are a few examples of which you may not be aware. Let's start with the electoral roll. The entire country is one electorate. However, you can only vote in your local polling booth which is determined by your address; unless you live in an Arab town or village. After 60 years, Israeli Arab villages don't have a clear address system. The security forces have them, they can locate where anyone lives, but that privilege does not extend to the actual residents, who do not have access to the information. It is something that anybody visiting a friend in an Arab village gets to know quickly: you get directions based on prominent landmarks rather than on streets and numbers.

Consequently, Arabs are allocated to a polling booth by name rather than address. So members of the same hamula (clan) who share the same surname are in the same polling booth. That gives the hamula leader enormous power to wheel and deal with the major political parties. The parties have the ability to tell whether he was as good as his word. It also places a lot more pressure on those who wish to defy the hamula. Clearly this subverts the very notion of democracy. While a civic project to

remedy the situation has received some international funding, the fact that the situation has been hitherto unrecognised is disturbing.

Everywhere I travelled in Israel, the same kind of employment advertisement could be seen in shop windows. Staff were required, but they had to be post-military. The motivation for the term wasn't necessarily racist – employers simply didn't want to train school leavers who were just killing time before the army, but the effect was nevertheless the same of excluding Arabs. Of course sometimes it is deliberate, as with safety officers with Israel railways (they inspect the condition of equipment, not security issues). There was a scheduled mass sacking of Arab workers for this month when the same condition became applicable.

Even reading about something as prosaic as an article on a "green laundry" had implications for this subject. Apparently most dry cleaning in Israel is carried out in giant plants in Arab villages where dangerous chemicals are used, as there is virtually no local government oversight of health and safety in those areas.

What ties all these examples together is the question of attitude. Unfortunately most Israeli Jews regard the notion of a Jewish democratic state as a state for the Jews where others also happen to live, but who are outside the public discourse.

People often challenge the last observation, and point to the security implications of almost everything in a country which has been in a state of emergency since it was founded. I usually point to Daylight Savings as something

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LET'S SHAPE OUR OWN FUTURE:

BE PART OF THE AJDS PLANNING WORKSHOP

Sunday 19 APRIL 9.45 am – 1.15pm

BYO snack to share

The AJDS invites members to participate in a dynamic and fun workshop aimed at confirming what AJDS's purpose is and what it wants to achieve and how it will do this. The workshop will be held as two-half day sessions with the first on Sunday 19 April.

At this first session we'll clarify AJDS's goals and objectives so that we are able to work more proactively, engage with other like-minded individuals or organisations and more readily recruit new members.

The second session will explore the most effective way to achieve the goals and objectives – that is what activities, strategies/tactics and tools should be employed. The date for the second session is still to be determined.

The workshop will be facilitated by Helen Rosenbaum who is a new member of the AJDS Executive. We are asking workshop participants to undertake one activity prior to the meeting. If you are not on email call Sol on 9318 3107 to book a spot, get the address, and have the material posted to you.

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***The views expressed in this
Newsletter are not necessarily those of the AJDS.
These are expressed in its
own statements.***

What we stand for:

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

In this issue...

*No issue of this Newsletter ever comes out quite the way it was planned, and this one is a very good proof. Produced in the shadow cast by Renate Kamenner death he have not had much time to prepepare it together as I would have liked. But we do have two tributes to Renate my own on **P4**, **Nura Resh** on **p5** and the article symbolises her personality **immediately below it**.*

*We always aim to balance, starting with our own activities (**opposite**) to the important issue of the day. Our **cover** deals with important issue of **Arabs in Israel**. This is matched nicely on **page 13** with another perennial issue of what it means to be pro-Israel today. The related question of the lobby is dealt with by Jonathan Freedland on **Page 6**.*

*The reverberation from the Gaza war continue and Moshe Yaroni's **centre page spread** on some of the associated morality issues is in my opinion one of the highlights of the issue.*

Another Israeli connection which I would very much like to draw your attention to is the review of Robin Rothfield's book Challenges facing Israel at 60. I was pleasantly surprised at how much Rothfield managed to cram to this relatively short book. I am confident you'll find it interesting.

*A monthly publication cannot deal with news as such but with the Australian Jewish News being so much part of the story our account of Jeff Halper on **page 7** is probably the first outsider's article on the subject you are likely to encounter. (Australia's independent Crikey.com.au used another protagonist, Antony Loewenstein, as its reporter.)*

*We also have two features on matters of more general interest. On **Page 12**, the Canberra Times' **Crispin Hull** explains how attempts to protect liberties may erode them. While young community activist Pablo Brait takes issue with the Rudd government's plans to combat climate change on **page 10**. His criticism may be seen as too harsh by some but as he says you cannot negotiate with the laws of physics and chemistry,*

There is no historical feature as such in this issue but tied in with the theme of dialogue of reconciliation which has been so much of the AJDS's work recently is an article on page 14 giving us ten terms not to use with Muslims. Both the terms eye-opening and consciousness-raising eaily come to mind.

Happy reading!

Sol Salbe

(Continued from page 1)

clearly outside the security arena. In dozens of articles that I have read on the subject in the Israeli media, I have not once come across the opinion of an Arab.

At the same time, there are questions that Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel do get asked, and asked often. Do they stand for the Israeli national anthem and do they sing it? The answer is that even those who stand up out of respect are unwilling to sing an anthem that speaks of the yearning of a Jewish heart. Not even a minister in the outgoing government who has served in the IDF was willing to sing it. Think of Australia: how would Australians of non-British origin feel about Rule Britannia (Britannia rules the waves...) as our national anthem?

It is true that for all the current shortcomings, Avigdor Lieberman, wants to go a bit further by making services and licences, even drivers licences, conditional on a loyalty oath. The problem however, is not that one of eight voters gave him the vote, when this was his chief campaign platform. What frightens me is the fact that so few people stood to fight against him. Both major parties, Kadima and Likud, made it plain that they could live with a version of a loyalty oath and even Labour is happy to sit in the same coalition government with Lieberman when his proposals form part of the coalition's guidelines.

The AJDS is a broad organisation. We hold different views on "a state of all its citizens" versus "a Jewish democratic state". That is a good thing. But we must be united in arguing the case that there cannot be two classes of citizens in a democracy.

The AJDS month: Where to start?

[Contributed]

Indeed, where does one start? The AJDS seems to have intervened in almost all the issues of political importance to the Jewish community. The most obvious place to see this was in the pages of the *Australian Jewish News*. There were letters from the AJDS and from our members, and plenty of those attacking us. But even the general media was paying attention to the AJDS, with letters being published as far afield as in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

But never mind the quantity -- the issues are more important. The AJDS took up the visit of former Iranian President Khatami. Unlike the Jewish community's official leadership, we thought it was important to engage with people like him in order to reduce tension in the Middle East. A more detailed view of the need for dialogue is outlined below.

We took up the Durban II Conference, with the statement published in our last issue being reported upon by the *AJN*.

That is not to mention showing the flag at the Harmony Festival, initiating a discussion on Afghanistan, defending ourselves against scurrilous attacks and organising the AJDS planning sessions (see front page).

Of course it was not all smooth sailing. As one Executive member observed, we have a newly configured executive, more active, younger, and operating under new rules only very recently established. Given this level of change in the AJDS at present, I don't think it is at all surprising that some misunderstandings, uncertainty, impetuosity, testing of limits, and miscommunication due to time

and technology pressures in email decision-making has occurred.

David Zyngier reports on a particularly significant event organised by the Centre for Diaspora Dialogue at La Trobe University. The centre had already held a successful dialogue between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in Melbourne.

On the night of 24 February over 30 people came together for an initial briefing in Parkville with the organisers. The meeting was efficiently run, with a brief introduction from Dr Camilleri about the nature of the dialogue, the aims and possibilities and the commitment involved. While there were only ten people from the Jewish community, four of those who turned up were associated, in one way or another, with AJDS. The other six were from B'nai B'rith and the SZC/JCCV hierarchies. Apologies were received from Mark Leibler, Mark Dreyfus, Philip Mendes, Rabbis Jonathan Keren Black and James Kennard among others. From the Arabic communities were many younger Palestinians as well as representatives from a number of key groups and peak bodies. This was, I believe, not mirrored by the Jewish community.

While everyone was asked to contribute some words about their priorities for dialogue, it was clear that there was solid agreement between the progressive Jews and the Palestinian/Arab/Muslims that the sole issue for dialogue revolved around Israel/Palestine. This was disputed by the other Jews there, who wanted to broaden the dialogue to include Iran and the greater Middle East. We have been asked not to detail any particular individual contributions, for this would breach the spirit of dialogue.

Genuine engagement is required

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society (AJDS) is puzzled that *The AJN* regards as front-page news a B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission (ADC) report by Dr Phillip Mendes about events that took place nearly a decade ago.

Debate within our community on Arab-Jewish dialogue is always important. However, a particular person's anecdotal experience with a now defunct academic organisation, in which two out of three of his adversaries were Jewish, provides no basis to conclude that dialogue is worthless

There is no question that support for dialogue with Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims extends far beyond the Left. We know that there are many genuine people who are willing to talk to the other side.

Earlier this year, more than 30 people committed themselves to hours of joint discussion about the Israel-Palestine conflict under the auspices of the Centre for Dialogue at Latrobe University, which has experience in issues as diverse as the Cyprus and Sri Lankan conflicts.

At this first event, many attended with strong Zionist credentials as well as Palestinians and Muslims, and people from outside these communities.

In fact, the Centre for Dialogue turned to the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and the Zionist Council of Vic-

toria to nominate potential participants.

We understand Dr Mendes was interested in the process but was unable to attend on the evening.

The event demonstrated the deep desire for understanding and communication to bridge the gulf created by the recent conflict in Gaza.

There are many other path-blazing activities such as Sa-laam/Shalom, a group of Jewish and Arab women who have met regularly in Melbourne for the past 10 years; inter-school visits by Jewish and Muslim youth, as well as many enduring informal and personal contacts between Palestinians and Jews.

The AJDS recognises that openness for dialogue—as a path to negotiation and conflict resolution—is more incumbent on those seen to be associated with the stronger side. There has to be a recognition that the two sides are not equal.

It is also the case that some on either side will absolutely refuse to consider dialogue. However, engagement in dialogue is the only route to peace. For that, the other side needs to know that we are genuine.

[Submitted to the *Australian Jewish News* following a collective effort and published there under Larry Stillman's name.]

VALE RENATE KAMENER

To say that Renate Kamener was a special woman may sound like a cliché, but it is true. Only once or twice in a lifetime does one come across such a free spirit with so many qualities. We all thought we knew her, but listening to and reading to the tributes, we all found that she had aspects which even some close to her did not know. Everyone who knew her is missing her, and the AJDS has already felt the pain of her absence.

If there was one recurring theme, it was that she was everyone's best friend. She was always listening and encouraging and continually cementing her friendships; she always made you feel important. As her son Larry observed: "Renate's ability to make friends and even more important to nurture and retain the friendships was little short of amazing. In the forty years I knew her I have yet to meet another person who could say, as she could, that the people she met over those years are still her friends."

Renate was a people person whose ability to gently persuade others continued to her very last day. Her friend Kali Paxinos recalls a parent-teacher evening where not enough parents had volunteered for the committee. As Paxinos tells it: "A voice from the back of the room spoke. She had a specific accent that I was not familiar with. 'Would the lady in the front row with the black hair like to nominate?' There was something about the voice that compelled me to say 'Yes.'"

To us in the AJDS she was more than a friend. She was a person with a natural leadership ability that was so effective because it was so subtle. When need be, Renate could persuade us to work together, even when our differences seemed insurmountable. She provided a cohesive force stronger than any known to science.

Her ability may have been natural, but her commitment to doing what is right, to justice, fairness and freedom was partly shaped by her own life. Renate was born on 8 June, 1933, in Breslau, Germany (now Wroclaw, Poland). Germany had just seen the rise of Hitler and in 1936 she was taken by her parents to South Africa to join some of their relatives who had moved there previously.

While her own life in South Africa was that of a comfortable middle-class girl, injustice in the racially segregated country had a profound impact on her. Once she met her husband Bob she became involved with a small Trotskyist organisation led by the charismatic Seymour Papert. In fact it was Bob who was involved first, but Renate's abilities made her a natural to take a position in the front line. Her work in those days was on the cusp of illegality. It included distributing the *Torch* in the Black townships they were not supposed to enter, as well as visiting prisoners in jail. It was only the sectarian stance

of the organisation, which made it highly critical of the Communist Party-aligned ANC, that stopped the police from attacking it.

After having despaired of any change in South Africa, Renate, Bob and their two sons moved to Australia. She became a member of the Australian Friends of Peace now, the forerunner of the Australian Jewish Democratic Society. Over the past decade Renate was a lynchpin in the formation, and more importantly the continuing existence, of Salaam/Shalom -- a group of women of

mostly Jewish and Arab/Muslim origin who regularly meet and keep up a dialogue. Renate's remarkable input, persistence and vision were formally recognised when, at the end of 2008, she attended Government House to receive an Award for Community Service to Multiculturalism.

I was fortunate enough to see Renate's consummate ability in operation in the AJDS. We had our differences and even loud arguments, but somehow Renate was able to weave her magic and ensure that things never got out of hand. Maybe all her years as a teacher came in handy, but when the occasion called for it we all behaved ourselves in those Committees and Executive meetings which Renate invariably chaired.

Chairing our meetings may have been arduous, but it did not require bravery. But the old determination to throw herself into the thick of things came to the forefront in one of our public meetings. The speaker was Marc H Ellis, an American Jewish theologian whose particular brand of anti-Zionism did not strike a chord with anyone at the meeting. While our Palestinian guest kept his cool, Norman Rothfield got very angry and Renate placed herself in the role of a human shield, standing between the protagonists and throwing a bucket of metaphorical cold water on the argument. And it was just as well, for we were making a rare use of B'nai B'rith's hall, and we would never have lived down a physical altercation.

When the need arose, she did make her views known plainly, but in such a gentle and persuasive way, even if one knew she was, like the rest of us, sometimes wrong. Of course being such a good supportive friend for so many people had its negative side. As so many of her relatives and friends commented, she was so often on the phone, it was extremely frustrating to keep on ringing and ringing just to get her opinion on a 30-second decision. But above all, I remember Renate Kamener as a friend, the one who listened and did her best to bring you up when you were down and who clearly enjoyed it when you were up.

The world is not the same without you, Renate.

Sol Salbe



My friend Renate

On a cold Friday morning last August, I hugged and kissed Renate and Bob "goodbye", leaving for the airport after a week of a warm, wonderful hosting at their home. The cab waiting outside was a sort of excuse to make it short, not to cry openly, and to pretend that it was just a regular "goodbye" from an Israeli who lives far away.

However, I knew then that I was saying goodbye forever and that I probably would not have another chance to meet Renate, to enjoy her wonderful personality, to appreciate her lifelong dedication to the cause of justice and human rights.

Unlike many of her friends and her family members, our friendship was a very short one. On October 2004 I came to the University of Melbourne for a sabbatical, not knowing a soul there, but with an introductory message to Norman Rothfield. A few days after my first contact, I had a call from a woman presenting herself as Renate, and from this very first conversation I had a sense of closeness, which I guess was one of Renate's personal virtues: to be interested in and caring for the other. I was invited for Sunday lunch, where I also met Norman and Evelyn and spoke about my protest activity in Machsom-Watch. From then on, for the two months of my stay in

the city, it was an intensive "come and go" with the Kameners or with Renate alone, spending time together, going to the movies or some performances, being taken around the city and its surrounds and making sure that I learn as much as possible about its various corners, introducing me to people, and talking and talking in a mixed manner (as women know) about politics, life experience, family and so on.

Renate's interest in people but also in social issues, her readiness to help, her dedication to causes that she felt were right and just, and her endless energy, made her an exceptional person whom I admired and loved dearly.

Until not long ago we continued to talk over the phone and her courageous behaviour in view of her obvious destiny, her ability to enjoy and be happy with her new home, was just another facet of what Renate was.

She told me: "I have to realise that I am not immortal."

I know it, Renate, but it is hard for me to accept what this means for our friendship.

I miss you tremendously.

[Nura Resh, who sent this to us from Herzliya, is an Israeli academic and peace activist.]

Palestinian-Israeli conflict: Us vs Them

[When I saw this item on Richard Silverstein's blog I thought of Renate's commitment to reaching across to the Other. She would have loved this - Ed.]

I took the kids to the Olympic Sculpture Park and visited Geoff McFetridge's graphic exhibition, In the Mind. It is a cheeky, satiric view of social attitudes.

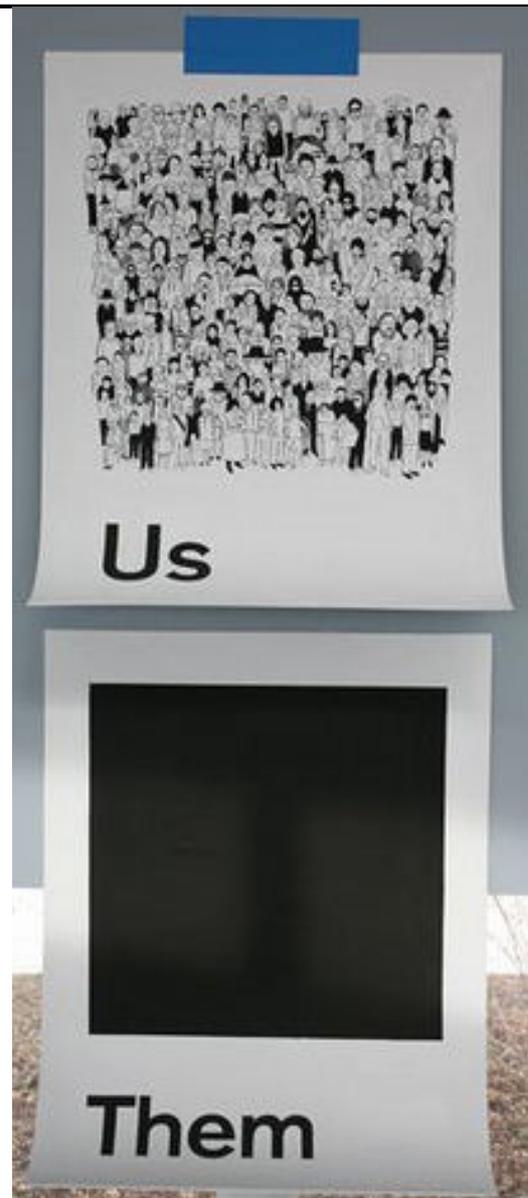
The PACCAR Pavilion seems to perfectly suit McFetridge's poster-based provocations. He treats the giant wall in the pavilion as an oversized bulletin board, complete with out-of-scale thumbtacks. The motifs and posters he developed for the space echo the concerns of many of the sculptures in the park, such as the relationship between man-made and natural forms, the interplay between two- and three-dimensional space, visual conundrums, and the arbitrariness of boundaries between different cultural practices.

I was struck by the Us-Them posters as a perfect encapsulation of Israeli and Palestinian attitudes towards each other. The "Us" poster shows a people in all its diversity. Every person and every detail is lovingly articulated. We know who we are. We appreciate us. We are a family.

"Them" is a dark whole. Nothing is distinguishable. We know nothing about them and can know nothing about them. They are impenetrable. The perfect enemy.

As I said, a perfect emblem of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

[Richard Silverstein is a Seattle blogger and writer.]



Forget "the Israel lobby" -- the reality is bad enough

Jonathan Freedland

Now they have their Joan of Arc. Those who have long claimed that the sinister, shadowy forces of "the Israel lobby" pull the strings of US foreign policy at last have a martyr. Last month Charles Freeman, a former diplomat, said he would not take the job he had been offered, chairing the US National Intelligence Council: he had, he said, been the victim of a campaign of "character assassination" conducted by an "Israel lobby [willing to] plumb the depths of dishonour and indecency". In a furious statement, he declared that the "aim of this lobby is control of the policy process".

Those who in 2006 lapped up the thesis argued by the US academics John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, attributing to the mighty lobby the power to divert the US from its own interests, seized on Freeman's fall as decisive proof. Walt himself declared: "For all of you out there who may have questioned whether there was a powerful 'Israel lobby'," he blogged, "think again."

As the reception to the original Mearsheimer-Walt article showed, this is radioactive terrain. Those who waded in carelessly can find themselves burnt. The explanation is not complicated. The notion that Jews wield excessive power, and do so in mysterious ways; that they advance the interests of a foreign power; that they function as some kind of fifth column, and that as such they have often led their country into needless wars -- all these are accusations that have been hurled at Jews going back many centuries. It should be no surprise that Jews' ears prick up if they think they can hear these old tunes hammered out once more.

And yet, after several conversations with Israel supporters in both Washington and Tel Aviv,



Charles "Chas" Freeman

I have found no one who denies that Freeman was indeed the victim of advocates for Israel. It is quite true that many on Capitol Hill disliked Freeman's devotion to Saudi Arabia, the country where he had once served as US ambassador. True, too, that a critical blow came from Nancy Pelosi, the house speaker, reportedly outraged by Freeman's overly indulgent attitude towards China's rulers. But I'm reliably told that these lines of attack originated with the pro-Israel crowd. Nor have Freeman's character assassins bothered to hide their fingerprints.

On the contrary, several have bragged about their role, among them Steve Rosen, a former official of the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee, or Aipac, who launched the attack on Freeman.

Surely, then, as Walt claimed, this settles not only the Freeman whodunit but the larger question of the mighty

"lobby". Clearly it is every bit as vicious -- and effective -- as its detractors have claimed, able to derail even a new and popular administration such as Barack Obama's simply because it had the temerity to pick a man who had, among other things, condemned the Israeli occupation as "brutal oppression" -- right? Not quite.



Jonathan Freedland

The flaws in the Mearsheimer-Walt case remain as visible as when they were exposed by the Palestinian-American scholar Joseph Massad, Noam Chomsky and a clutch of other anti-Zionists. For one thing, if Israel and its backers really did control United States foreign policy, there would never be any divergence between them: Washington would simply do "the Lobby's" bidding. But that is hardly the case. One can go back to the mid-1980s, when Israel and its friends begged the Reagan administration not to sell Awacs surveillance planes to Saudi Arabia -- to no avail: the Saudis got their planes. Or spool forward to 1991 when George Bush pressured Israel to attend a peace conference against its will and withheld \$10bn in much-needed loan guarantees unless Israel agreed to freeze settlements on occupied land. You might mention Israel's proposed arms sales to China: Washington compelled Israel to back down, first in 2000 and again in 2005. More awkwardly, Israel has long sought the release of those who spied for it against the US. Washington has consistently refused.

Chomsky asks a useful question. If the US has been led to behave the way it does in the Middle East by the cunning "Israel lobby", how come it behaves the same way elsewhere? "What were 'the lobbies' that led to pursuing very similar policies throughout the world?" As for the Middle East, Chomsky quotes the scholar Stephen Zunes: "There are far more powerful interests that have a stake in what happens in the Persian Gulf region than does Aipac [or the lobby generally], such as the oil companies, the arms industry and other special interests whose lobbying influence and campaign contributions far surpass that of the much-vaunted Zionist lobby ..."

The naive assumption at work here is that the American dog has no interests of its own, leaving it free to be wagged by the pro-Israel tail. It's a convenient view, casting the great superpower as a hapless, and essentially innocent, victim. But guess what: the US emphatically does have its own strategic interests -- oil chief among them -- and it guards them fiercely. Support for Israel as a loyal, dependable ally -- ready to take on Arab and other forces that might pose a threat to those interests -- has served America's purposes well. That's why the US acts the way it does, not because Aipac tells it to.

Perhaps the most powerful example -- if only because so many believe the reverse to be true -- is the Iraq war. Plenty of Mearsheimer-Walt followers reckon it was the "Lobby" wot done it: it was Israel that pushed for war. But as Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Colin

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Jeff Halper visit -- what were they scared of?

Sol Salbe

Not many AJDS members seem to have attended Jeff Halper's talk in Melbourne; this is a pity because more people could have provided a better perspective. The situation was different up north where publicity, particularly in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, ensured that very few Jews of whatever political persuasion would have been left unaware of Halper's schedule.

The publicity came care of an own goal scored by the publisher of the *Australian Jewish News*, Robert Magid, who overrode his staff and banned an advertisement for Halper's talks. He explained to the *SMH's* Andrew West that while he did not know Professor Halper -- or anything about his work with the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions -- he had refused to publish the ad because "I don't like the crowd who are bringing him out".

"I am familiar with them," Magid said. "They use their Judaism to bash other Jews and issues associated with the Jewish community."

Magid was obviously not as familiar with Jews Against the Occupation or with the other groups, as he made out to be. The organisation supports the continuing existence of the state of Israel within its borders. As JAO activist Angela Budai wrote to the *AJN*: "Just how well does Magid know me? I am a member of the 'dissident' Jews Against the Occupation. I am also an elected member of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, the official voice of the NSW Jewish community.

"I am also a member of my local synagogue and active in our social justice committee. None who are truly familiar with me and the work I do would accuse me of using my Judaism to bash other Jews or our community. Rather, they understand that despite alternative political views, I am fighting to have a progressive voice heard in our community."

As the story progressed, the goalposts kept on changing. *AJN* readers will be offended at the ideas of someone who does not support Israel as a Jewish state, a letter to the *SMH* claimed. This was countered by the present writer, who pointed out that his own view that Israel

(Continued from page 6)

Powell, and others have explained, Israel's leaders in fact repeatedly warned against an attack on Saddam, fearing it would distract from, and embolden, what it regarded as the real threat, namely Iran. As it happened, they were right.

So the myth of an all-powerful Israel lobby, pulling the strings, is a delusion. But it's equally false to pretend that Aipac and its allies don't exist or exert genuine influence. They do and they play hardball, as the Freeman affair has vividly demonstrated. (Indeed, the negative publicity that has resulted may make this victory a pyrrhic one.)

Viewed this way, clearly and through a lens unclouded by exaggeration and mythology, they are to be strenuously opposed. Their attempt to limit the voices heard in Washington is not just an offence against pluralism, it also hurts the very cause Aipac purports to serve: Israel.

should be as Israeli as Australia Is Australian, was published on several occasions in the *AJN*. It was indeed seen as being counterposed to it being a Jewish state, but in the vigorous debate in the letters columns of the *Jewish News* no one ever said this kind of view was offensive.

Reports circulating within the Jewish community of Halper's talk made him sound like an ogre who could change folks' minds in a single session. People were warned to stay away as if he were another Billy Graham trying to steal Jewish souls. Frankly, I was a bit let down. I thought the talk was too long and tried to cover too much. While Halper is not the first person to be guilty of that, what really disappointed me was his lack of rigour. He sounded too much like an anthropologist (which is his profession), and not enough of a rigorous social scientist.

Time and time again he presented a very good case only to go off at a tangent at the last moment instead of clinching the arguments. One got the impression that he did not consider that the other side's counter-arguments were worthy of consideration. His treatise on the security barrier was full of interesting facts, not to mention great visuals, but not once did he attempt to deal with those who support the wall against terrorists. I got the impression that he takes no interest in the vigorous debate on this issue in the Israeli media.

My own critique of Meretz's attitude to the Gaza War is known, but Halper's presentation raised the hackles for the simple reason that it was so oversimplified, it was not true.

What would they do if a truly effective critic of Israel were to visit Australia?



Jeff Halper

Aipac's approach -- not so much pro-Israel as pro the Israeli right wing -- ends up pushing US politicians away from the policies Israel itself needs, specifically the dialogue with enemies and territorial concessions that are necessary if Israel's long-term future is to be secured.

The good news is that alternatives are emerging. Founded last year, J Street styles itself as a "pro-Israel, pro-peace" advocacy organisation, thereby creating a space for those US politicians who support Israel but believe the policy of recent Israeli governments is hurting Palestinians and imperilling the future of the Jewish state. Aipac and its allies have had the monopoly on Israel advocacy for too long. Let's hope the Freeman episode prompts America's leaders to take a hard look at them, to see them as they really are: not all-powerful -- and not always right either.

[Originally published in the *Guardian*.]

The IDF and Gaza

Moshe Yaroni

The war of words over Gaza has begun in earnest. In the wake of the revelations by some veterans of the war, the burning question is: "Did Israel commit war crimes in Gaza?"

Of course it did. No armed conflict in history has been fought without war crimes being committed, by all parties. War is an ugly business, not given to being run by a rulebook. And these days, with conflicts increasingly being characterised by poorly armed militias battling regular armies in populated urban areas, it's getting a lot uglier.

But that's the wrong question. The right one is that raised by the testimony given by those Israel Defence Forces soldiers: were the breaches of both international law and Israeli military regulations and norms the result of individual soldiers going beyond their bounds, or were they due to an atmosphere created by, or because of directives handed down from the middle and upper echelons of the Israeli military?

This question is not likely to be answered any time soon. Israel is contenting itself with pronouncements that it has "the most moral army in the world" rather than responsibly examining whether that still holds true. Meanwhile, pundits are eagerly savaging the officer who runs the Yitzhak Rabin pre-military preparatory course at Oranim Academic College in Tivon, Danny Zamir.



Chief-of-Staff Ashkenazi: certain of the moral behaviour of the IDF

Far from being the "notorious ultra-leftist" he is being painted as, Major Zamir is a 20-year veteran of the IDF, a deputy commander of an elite reserve battalion, and his academy, which he's run for over a decade, has trained many IDF officers. He did serve a month's detention in 1990 for refusing to guard a settler procession, so he obviously has some tendencies in anti-settlement directions. But to paint

this man as anything other than a dedicated soldier is simply absurd and counter-factual.

The need for credibility

Of course, Israel stated that it intended to investigate the allegations raised at Oranim. The problem was the nature of the investigation and the identity of the investigators.

The inquiry was carried out by the IDF. This is problematic; it should be obvious that one cannot legitimately investigate oneself. Even if the investigation was indeed sincere and thorough, it still won't be seen as unbiased. Only an external investigation can provide that credibility. The IDF can and should be involved in the investigation, but it must be led by credible civilian experts.

The public, both in Israel and around the world, needs to

know whether the Israeli armed forces as a whole took proper care to avoid killing or injuring civilians, and to minimise damage to both civilian people and property.

Serious allegations, insufficient responses

The discrepancies between the numbers of civilian casualties reported by Palestinian human rights groups in Gaza and those calculated by the IDF are to be expected. But they also reflect differing views of who is a civilian. For instance, some 250 Palestinian police were killed. Israel considers them combatants; Palestinians and human rights groups do not. Under international law, civil police are not legitimate targets, but Israel says they were also part of Hamas' militia. If it's true that the police were engaged in military activities, they lose their protection as civilians. But evidence to support this claim has not yet been presented.

The points Israel has raised in its defence aren't convincing. They repeatedly say that they dropped leaflets, and even placed phone calls directly warning civilians to abandon certain areas. The trouble is that, in Gaza, there was nowhere to go. The absolute seal on the borders of Gaza, a densely



Danny Zamir

populated but small area, left people nowhere to flee, a fact Israel must have been aware of. That makes the steps the Israel Defence Forces took look more like cover for Israel than an expression of genuine concern for Palestinian civilians.

The issue of white phosphorus illustrates the problem. Human Rights Watch issued a stunning report on Israel's use of phosphorus. In contrast to the recent report by Amnesty International, which was long on rhetoric and disturbingly short on evidence, HRW's report makes a strong case that Israel used phosphorus weapons improperly. Israel insists it used the weapon "in accordance with international law." But, since this weapon is only permissible in open areas when used to illuminate a battlefield, and expressly forbidden in populated civilian areas, Israel's statement is factually impossible.

More likely, Israel's meaning is that it was not trying to use white phosphorus as an incendiary weapon to harm people, but rather for its intended purpose of illumination. That the terrain forbade the use for this purpose is likely seen by Israel as the inevitable consequence of fighting Hamas which was taking shelter in civilian areas.

This question illustrates the key points we must get at in Gaza: did Israel take the proper care to avoid harm to civilians as defined, not by Israel, but by international humanitarian law? And to what extent did Hamas' use of civilians and civilian infrastructure compromise Israel's ability to comply with the law? Both these questions must be answered credibly, and one cannot be answered unless the other is given equal weight.

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

An atmosphere that leads to war crimes

Asa Kasher, a professor at Tel Aviv University, drafted the IDF ethical code of conduct. Recently, in *Haaretz*, Kasher said: "If it's between the soldier and the terrorist's neighbour, the priority is the soldier."



Asa Kasher's surname may mean kosher in Hebrew but his views on morality unfortunately are far from kosher.

Many may agree with that concept. But it flies in the face of the laws of war, and the international norms that Israel has repeatedly vowed to uphold. The testimony of the Gaza veterans indicates that the lives of soldiers were prioritised well ahead of sparing civilians as much as possible.

Mere days after the beginning of Operation Cast Lead, Deputy IDF Chief of Staff Brigadier-General Dan Harel made it clear that Israel was not

limiting itself to military targets, but was targeting the civilian infrastructure of Gaza, as it was part of the Hamas government. The fact is that Hamas controls the systems that civilians need for day to day life, and those parts that are not military in nature cannot be targeted.

Therein lies the rub, and the need for a full and impartial investigation. Israel doesn't deny that it hit many civilian targets in the war. Israel has claimed that Hamas made extensive use of civilians and civilian sites for military purposes, and there is significant evidence to support this claim. When an army deliberately targets a civilian site, the burden of proof is on it to demonstrate that the site was, in fact, being used for military purposes, or the army at least had very good reason to believe so. Israel has offered no such proof beyond its good word.

Israel's current responses to accusations of war crimes in Gaza are convincing no one outside those who dismissed the allegations out of hand in the first place. This is to be expected when the investigations are conducted, in essence, by the accused and the results exonerate Israel completely. Many, this writer included, would very much like to see Israel exonerated of as many accusations as it can be. But this can only happen if the truth can be established by a credible body, and if we are all prepared to deal with whatever that truth may turn out to be.

[Moshe Yaroni is the nom de plume of a US Jew who has spent his life engaged in study and work to bring about a peaceful future for Israel and the Palestinians. He is a contributor to the website *Jewcy*, from which this is taken.]

Why do you single out Israel?

[This is a question that many of us have been asked as well. Blogger **Phillip Weiss** provides an interesting angle. In my opinion it is not the full story but a part of it that ought to be taken on board – Ed.]

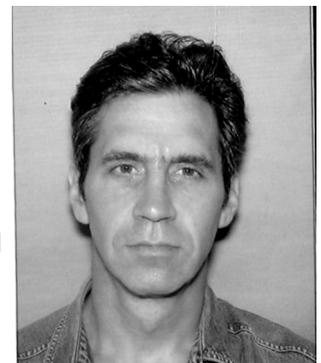
Why do we single Israel out for indictment in a sea of man's inhumanity to man? It's the Dershowitz question, implying that we do so because we're antisemitic. Well here is a very smart response to that post from Ilene Cohen, who describes the question as "the ultimate whine".

Perhaps you'd seen this last summer, but in case not, here's UN rapporteur Richard Falk on the subject from the *Nation*. Falk's response:

"The Human Rights Council is often accused of being overly selective, too critical of Israel, too lenient with respect to a variety of Third World countries. There is no doubt that any political institution will establish priorities based on the concerns of its membership. From this perspective it's not surprising that a focus should be placed on Israel and the Palestinian plight. *After all, the UN has a special responsibility for Palestine that goes back to its effort to partition the mandate for the territory in 1947. From the UN perspective this unconsummated effort to address the future of both Palestinians and Israelis is, in a sense, the greatest unresolved issue on the UN agenda* [Weiss emphasis]. Beyond this, the prolonged Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is

unprecedented in international experience and has produced immense Palestinian suffering. It should also be noted that the HRC has appointed special rapporteurs for other situations of severe human rights concern, including North Korea and Myanmar."

I would add the following to the case: Israel bills itself as a Western democracy, so the idea that expectations should be the same as for the Congo, North Korea or China, for that matter, is absurd.



Phillip Weiss

Any publication is, in the final analysis, as good as the feedback that it gets. We need to hear from you not only what you liked and disliked but what you missed. Are there any issues that we should have covered, but haven't? Are there any films, books, or exhibitions that we should have reviewed? Your contributions, letters, comments and thoughts are the best guidelines we can have for future work.

CPRS is not going to help climate change

Pablo Brait

"And I'm sure when this is delivered...we'll get attacked from the Left, from the Right." PM Kevin Rudd, *7.30 Report*, 11 December 2008.

Questioned about the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) on the ABC's *7.30 Report* in December, Kevin Rudd gave us a neat summary of the spin his government employs to explain its climate change policy-making philosophy. They would have us believe that the completely inadequate emissions reduction target of 5 to 15 per cent by 2020, massive giveaways to big business at the expense of the Australian public and a position that can only help to derail international negotiations on a global emissions reduction deal is somehow a balanced position.

However, putting aside the obvious sway that the coal and other big polluter lobbies have on the Federal Government, let's take Rudd at his word. The ALP, in the absence of a clear ideological position on an issue, aims to make policy by seeking a "balance" between the Left and Right of the political spectrum, and arriving at some middle ground. On climate change they are claiming to have done just this — they have consulted with big business, unions and environmentalists and come out with a policy that they claim "gets the balance right" between these competing forces. While this process can be considered flawed at the best of times, its application to climate change is downright dangerous.

Laws of physics and chemistry

Why? Because no matter how skilled a negotiator you are, it's impossible to strike a deal with the laws of physics and chemistry -- which leads to our first question which no one in the corporate media is asking: "Where are the scientists?" The climate change problem is not the same as an ideological battle on industrial relations or the privatisation of essential services.

At its heart, climate change is an issue based in the physical sciences — heat is being trapped in our atmosphere and changing the climate cycles of the planet. No amount of consultation with stakeholder groups and interested parties will change that. Lobby groups, whether they represent business, welfare or environmental interests, have no place determining what Australia's and the world's greenhouse gas emissions targets should be. Where they do have a very important role to play is in determining what actions are taken or how targets are met. But targets must be decided by scientists.

Neither Kevin Rudd nor Penny Wong mentioned scientists in their spruiking of the atrocious Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS). Not one prominent climate scientist has come out in support of the scheme; in fact many have denounced it. What Kevin Rudd refers to as "the Left" actually includes a majority of the world's scientists. Without a basis in science, the CPRS is a joke.

Currently, a precautionary scientific consensus is emerging around the need to stabilise atmospheric carbon dioxide levels at well below 350 parts per million (ppm), probably closer to 300ppm to avoid runaway climate change. (These figures are carbon dioxide only, not carbon dioxide equivalent.) Our current levels are around

390ppm, and Rudd's recently announced targets, if adopted by the rest of the world, would have us stabilising at around 450ppm — resulting in hundreds of millions, if not billions of human deaths over the next 100 years.

Beyond ignoring the very people they should be consulting, the Federal Labor Government continues John Howard's tradition of justifying bad climate change policy by trotting out the archaic dichotomy: environment or economy? How many times does it have to be said? Without healthy ecosystems that enable us to breathe clean air, drink unpolluted water, grow sufficient food and live relatively disease, drought and fire-free, there is no economy, society or human civilisation.

Dichotomy

It is unclear whether Rudd and his ministers actually believe in this dichotomy, or just use it when convenient. The most recent economic stimulus package, which includes a \$507 million increase in the solar hot water rebate and \$3.3 billion for ceiling insulation, shows that the government can put forward initiatives that benefit both the economy and energy efficiency. It's a good start but this piecemeal approach is far from sufficient as an emissions reduction policy. Furthermore, a lot more money has been allocated for counter-productive measures like the \$12.7 billion worth of electoral bribes to taxpayers, which encourage consumption and thereby will probably increase emissions.

The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is so far from being adequate that the grassroots climate action movement, made up of about 200 groups from every state and territory has adopted a position resolutely in opposition to it. It will do more harm than good and we are advocating for it to be defeated in the Senate. This position has convinced bigger groups such as Greenpeace and the Australian Conservation Foundation to follow suit. A defeat of the CPRS will not mean an end to government attempts at climate change policy, as Australia will still have to negotiate targets within the UN process.

Targets and trajectory

A climate change policy-making process that would actually give us a chance to get it right would involve scientists deciding on emissions targets for 2020 and 2050 and planning a trajectory to meet them. Then, a thorough, participatory process with the general public and business could be held to determine how these targets are to be met. The Federal Government would take these policies and processes to international negotiations and would actually be setting a good example rather than destroying the goodwill extended to Australia following its ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

In the meantime, while Rudd is busy congratulating himself on his politically laudable balancing act, Australians are left to ponder when climate science will be given appropriate credence in policy making and when the outdated and destructive environment-economy divide will finally stop being spouted in political rhetoric.

[Pablo Brait is a member of Yarra Climate Action Now, a grassroots climate action group in inner Melbourne (<http://yarraclimateactionnow.blogspot.com>)]

RAISINS AND ALMONDS

Winds of Change

Commenting on former Vice-President Dick Cheney's recent assertion that the closure of Guantanamo will make America more vulnerable to attack, Obama said, "I fundamentally disagree with Dick Cheney. Not surprisingly. You know, I think that Vice-President Cheney has been at the head of a movement whose notion is somehow that we can't reconcile our core values, our Constitution, our belief that we don't torture, with our national security interests. I think he's drawing the wrong lesson from history.

"The facts don't bear him out. I think he is, that attitude, that philosophy has done incredible damage to our image and position in the world. I mean, the fact of the matter is after all these years how many convictions actually came out of Guantanamo? How many terrorists have actually been brought to justice under the philosophy that is being promoted by Vice-President Cheney? It hasn't made us safer.

What it has been is a great advertisement for anti-American sentiment. Which means that there is constant effective recruitment of Arab fighters and Muslim fighters against US interests all around the world."

[US 60 Minutes program via Juancole.com.]

Louise Arbour to head ICG

Louise Arbour has been selected to head the International Crisis Group, replacing Gareth Evans. She will take up the position in July.

From 2004 to 2008, Arbour served as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the highest office mandated by the international community to promote and protect human rights. Before this, she was a Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.

From 1996 to 1999, she served as the Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. In these roles, she drove a significant expansion of trial activity, bringing tens of accused war criminals into custody and leading the Tribunal to issue the first war crimes indictment by an international court of a serving head of state, President Slobodan Milosevic.

Gareth Evans will return to Australia to engage in his role as Co-Chair of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, a joint global initia-

tive of the Australian and Japanese governments.

[From the International Crisis Group.]

Cultural diversity -- "the ultimate stimulus package"

Sam Afra, Chairperson of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) called the release of the Victorian Government's new Multicultural Policy as a "timely nod of support to the generations of migrants who have helped make the state the place it is today.

"With the Australian Government set to reduce the number of skilled migrant visas allocated each year, it is crucial that the contributions of our migrant communities are not discounted or overlooked and their concerns sidelined or demonised," Afra said. "With so much uncertainty in the current climate, people are naturally asking governments: 'where to next?'" Afra noted. "So social policies have to go beyond grand aspirational statements to include practical initiatives that will

improve the lives of everyday Victorians."

[From the ECCV.]

B'Tselem: Hamas must release Shalit

On Saturday, 21 March, Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit will have been held by his captors in an unknown location, probably in the Gaza Strip, for 1000 days. The circumstances of his capture and the behaviour of his captors clearly indicate that he is legally a hostage.

International humanitarian law absolutely prohibits taking and holding a person by force in order to compel the enemy to meet certain demands, while threatening to harm or kill the person if the demands are not met. Furthermore, hostage-taking is considered a war crime and all those involved in it bear individual criminal liability.

The leadership of Hamas is obligated to release Shalit immediately and unconditionally. Until he is released, those holding him must grant him humane treatment and allow representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit him.

The denial of Shalit's right to these visits constitutes a blatant violation of international law, and casts a heavy shadow over claims that Shalit's wellbeing has been maintained.

[From B'Tselem.]



"The cure to your disease came from stem cell research. Sign here if you wish to refuse treatment for moral, religious or ideological reasons."

Attempts to protect liberties may erode them

Crispin Hull

We can say this much for Prime Minister Kevin Rudd: he has at least stopped the march of Howardism. But he has done precious little to wind it back. He has tinkered a bit with better treatment for asylum seekers. He has engaged in a bit of symbolism with Kyoto and Sorry. But most of everything else has been either left in place or shuffled off to inquiries and in the meantime still left in place.

Perhaps the most corrosive elements left of the Howard legacy are the excesses of the anti-terrorism laws.

A Senate Estimates Committee hearing was told recently that the cost of the botched investigation into Dr Mohamed Haneef was \$4.7million. The Haneef fiasco would never have happened without the anti-terrorism laws, nearly all of which were unnecessary. Ordinary criminal law could have dealt with these cases.

Elevating them to a special class by making them part of a "war against terror" has had two corrosive and counter-productive effects. First it changes the label of the perpetrator of violence from "criminal" to "terrorist". Add to that the adage that one person's "terrorist" is another person's "freedom fighter", and the apparatus of the law turns "criminal" into "fighter", in the eyes of those supporting sundry Palestinian, Muslim or Arab causes and opposing Israel and United States policies in the Middle East. More importantly, the anti-terrorist legislation undermines the rule of law.

Eminent Jurists

Recently, the Eminent Jurists Panel on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Human Rights, established by the International Commission of Jurists, published its report on the effect of the anti-terrorism laws in 40 countries in the seven years since the attacks on the US on September 11, 2001.

Panelists said, "Terrorism sows terror, and many states have fallen into a trap set by the terrorists. Ignoring lessons from the past, they have allowed themselves to be rushed into hasty responses, introducing an array of measures which undermine cherished values as well as the international legal framework carefully developed since the Second World War. These measures have resulted in human rights violations, including torture, enforced disappearances, secret and arbitrary detentions, and unfair trials. There has been little accountability for these abuses or justice for their victims..."

"Undemocratic regimes with deplorable human rights records have referred to counter-terror practices of countries like the US [and Australia] to justify their own abusive policies..."

"Criminal justice systems, not secret intelligence, should be at the heart of the legal response to terrorism. We have seen intelligence services around the world acting with insufficient accountability and intelligence cooperation being undertaken outside the rule of law."

The panel warned of the danger that exceptional "temporary" counter-terrorism measures were becoming permanent features of law and practice, including in democratic societies.

This is precisely the position in Australia. The panel said the change of US administration might provide one of the last chances to revert to normal legal practices.

The Barack Obama Administration has certainly shown more willingness to wind back the excesses of the Bush administration than Rudd has to backtrack on the Howard excesses.

The Howard government passed more than 40 anti-terrorism laws in a huge overreaction to the September 11 events. It was a massive volume of hundreds of pages of hastily drafted and enacted legislation. The then Labor Opposition was intimidated into going along with it, not even demanding a sunset clause.

The absence of a Bill of Rights in Australia meant the laws could override long-standing conventions about human rights. The Parliament just handed over excessive powers to the executive. With little or no effective judicial supervision, Australia has control orders that amount to house arrest with no trial; sedition provisions that can imprison people for what they say; secret surveillance of people not charged; detention of witnesses for up to a week; and sanctions against media coverage even where the powers are abused.

Liberties eroded

These laws are especially corrosive in the current legal environment in Australia. In the past decade or so, High Court judges (with a couple of exceptions) have taken a "legal positivist" approach to both the constitution and statute law. That approach says: "This is the law and we apply it, no matter how repugnant or offensive it might be to long-cherished standards. The law is the law."

Do not expect the High Court to be a bulwark against the excesses of the legislature. And certainly do not expect the constitution itself to be such a bulwark. It contains virtually no effective guarantees against legislative and executive intrusion upon hitherto accepted legal protections, as the Haneef case so pointedly revealed.

Nor should one expect Australians themselves to rise up and demand protection against incursions by government on their liberty. The bulk of Australians are too complacent, naive or ignorant. A Roy Morgan poll in 2006 found that 60 per cent of Australians thought we already had a Bill of Rights, such is the pervasive influence of American television.

Perhaps this can give rise to a new mantra about constitutional change: "If it ain't fixed, then why break it?"

Like Obama, Rudd was elected by voters with a great deal of hope and promise. Rudd is now halfway into his term and we have had only tinkering on civil liberties, good government and constitutional change.

It is one thing to be justifiably wary of a Gough Whitlam "crash through or crash" approach, but quite another to allow inertia, overcaution and the terror of imagined voter backlash to allow these blots on Australian jurisprudence to remain on the statute book.

[Former Canberra Times editor Crispin Hull still writes a weekly column for the paper.]

What it means to be pro-Israel

Ezra Klein

Writing in *The New York Times* during Operation Cast Lead, Nicholas Kristof condemned the murderous provocations of Hamas, but concluded, "Israel's right to do something doesn't mean it has the right to do anything." The very next day, Kristof's colleague Roger Cohen gave voice to his private horror. "I have never previously felt so despondent about Israel, so shamed by its actions," he wrote. These are not writers who tend to criticise Israel. For the American media, this is not normal.

But it is not the criticism that should concern Israelis so much as the response to that criticism, which has exposed a dangerous and counterproductive defensiveness on the part of those who would protect the Jewish



For many years, every presidential candidate has seen the need to address AIPAC.

state. The resulting fight has manifested itself as a struggle to define what it means to be pro-Israel, and has spawned two distinct camps.

Traditionally, Israel's American advocates have prized a dogmatic species of support, best encapsulated in the "Israel, right-or-wrong" approach favoured by groups like the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). There is little room for discussion in this vision, and even less for dissent. Debate on a specific action is recast as a referendum on Israel itself.

The upside of this strategy is that it silences disagreement. While many question the strategic wisdom and proportionality of Operation Cast Lead, fewer are against Israel. The downside is that this makes for a brittle form of support. It cannot bend. It can only break. To judge the State of Israel wrong is a much graver judgment than to see its Gaza operation as misguided.

In recent years, a challenge has arisen to this perspective. In part out of virtue and in part out of necessity, new groups like J Street have argued that Israel is sometimes right and sometimes wrong. This approach has more space for criticism, which also means it has more space for support. It can bend without breaking.

This has terrified the "right-or-wrong" crowd. Their

counter-assault spilled out onto the pages of *Haaretz* in January, when James Kirchick penned a telling column meant to discredit J Street before a progressive Israeli audience. "How can J Street claim to be 'pro-Israel,'" he asked, "when its capitulating stance on the first major Israeli military offensive since the Second Lebanon War is contradicted by over 80 per cent of Israelis?"



Ezra Klein

At issue here is J Street's contention that Operation Cast Lead was an understandable response to Hamas, but will ultimately prove counterproductive, and that a ceasefire should be pursued immediately. It is a contention shared by, among others, the editorial board of *Haaretz*, which wrote that Hamas' villainy "cannot serve as a pretext for a cruel, all-out war against 1.5 million Palestinian civilians." Are they, too, anti-Israel? Moreover, it is a contention shared by many American Jews, and many Americans in general. Initial polls showed a close split among the US public, with 44 per cent voicing support for Israel's actions and 41 per cent voicing scepticism. A majority wants to see Israel agree to a truce. Only a quarter disagree. This conflicted support and hope for swift cessation almost precisely echoes J Street's position.

But at issue here is not whether these poll respondents are right or wrong. It is whether they are anti-Israel or not. Kirchick offered a surprising test: To be "pro-Israel," he argued, an American group's positions must mirror those of the Israeli public.

Elsewhere, he changes the metric slightly, arguing that J Street's claim to be pro-Israel is "dubious" because it supports direct negotiations with Hamas, which the Israeli government does not. (J Street, incidentally, says it supports mediated negotiations, along the lines of those that led to the June cease-fire.) Here it is official government policy, rather than public opinion surveys, that serves as the loyalty test. The Israeli government does negotiate with Hamas, as the now-shattered cease-fire showed, and *Haaretz* polling from the spring of 2008 showed more than 60 percent of Israelis supported negotiations. That majority has flipped in recent months. Does being pro-Israel require tracking changes in Israeli opinion? How often do you have to be certified as "pro-Israel" to make sure your opinions are current?

The absurdity of such loyalty tests is self-evident. But their existence gets to the heart of the problem. The American centre, thankfully, considers itself resolutely pro-Israel. But it does not agree with Israel's every action. It would be deeply unwise to write that perspective, and those supporters, out of the community that can consider itself "pro-Israel." A country that cannot brook criticism cannot have friends. And now that military operations have subsided for the time being, Israel still needs friends. Indeed, it may need them more than ever.

Ten terms not to use with Muslims

Chris Seiple

In the course of my travels – from the Middle East to Central Asia to Southeast Asia – it has been my great privilege to meet and become friends with many devout Muslims. These friendships are defined by frank respect as we listen to each other; understand and agree on the what, why, and how of our disagreements, political and theological; and, most of all, deepen our points of commonality as a result.

I have learned much from my Muslim friends, foremost this: Political disagreements come and go, but genuine respect for each other, rooted in our respective faith traditions, does not. If there is no respect, there is no relationship, merely a transactional encounter that serves no one in the long term.



As President Obama considers his first speech in a Muslim majority country and as the US national security establishment reviews its foreign policy and public diplomacy, I want to share

the advice given to me from dear Muslim friends worldwide regarding words and concepts that are not useful in building relationships with them. Obviously, we are not going to throw out all of these terms, nor should we. But we do need to be very careful about how we use them, and in what context.

1. "The Clash of Civilisations." Invariably, this kind of discussion ends up with us as the good guy and them as the bad guy. There is no clash of civilisations, only a clash between

those who are for civilisation, and those who are against it. Civilisation has many characteristics but two are foundational: 1) It has no place for those who encourage, invite, and/or commit the murder of innocent civilians; and 2) It is defined by institutions that protect and promote both the minority and the transparent rule of law.

2. "Secular." The Muslim ear tends to hear "godless" with the pronunciation of this word. And a godless society is simply inconceivable to the vast majority of Muslims worldwide. Pluralism – which encourages those with (and those without) a God-based worldview to have a welcomed and equal place in the public square – is a much better word.

3. "Assimilation." This word suggests that the minority Muslim groups in North America and Europe need to look like the majority, Christian culture. Integration, on the other hand, suggests that all views, majority and minority, deserve equal respect as long as each is willing to be civil with one another amid the public square of a shared society.

4. "Reformation." Muslims know quite well, and have an opinion about, the battle taking place within Islam and what it means to be an orthodox and devout Muslim. They don't need to be insulted by suggesting they follow the Christian example of Martin Luther. Instead, ask how

Muslims understand *ijtihad*, or reinterpretation, within their faith traditions and cultural communities.

5. "Jihadi." The jihad is an internal struggle first, a process of improving one's spiritual self-discipline and getting closer to God. The lesser jihad is external, validating "just war" when necessary. By calling the groups we are fighting "jihadis," we confirm their own – and the worldwide Muslim public's – perception that they are religious. They are not.

They are terrorists, hirabists, who consistently violate the most fundamental teachings of the Holy Koran and mainstream Islamic scholars and imams.

6. "Moderate." This ubiquitous term is meant politically but can be received theologically. If someone called me a "moderate Christian," I would be deeply offended. I believe in an Absolute who also commands me to love my neighbour. Similarly, it is not an oxymoron to be a mainstream Muslim who believes in an Absolute. A robust and civil pluralism must make room for the devout of all faiths, and none.

7. "Interfaith." This term conjures up images of watered-down, lowest common denominator statements that avoid the tough issues and are consequently irrelevant. "Multifaith" suggests that we name our deep and irreconcilable theological differences in order to work across them for practical effect – according to the very best of our faith traditions, much of which are values we share.

8. "Freedom." Unfortunately, "freedom," as expressed in American foreign policy, does not always seek to engage how the local community and culture understands it. Absent

such an understanding, freedom can imply an unbound licentiousness. The balance between the freedom to something (liberty) and the freedom from something (security) is best understood in a conversation with the local context and, in particular, with the Muslims who live there. "Freedom" is best framed in the context of how they understand such things as peace, justice, honour, mercy, and compassion.

9. "Religious freedom." Sadly, this term too often conveys the perception that American foreign policy is only worried about the freedom of Protestant evangelicals to proselytise and convert, disrupting the local culture and indigenous Christians. Although not true, I have found it better to define religious freedom as the promotion of respect and reconciliation with the other at the intersection of culture and the rule of law – sensitive to the former and consistent with the latter.

10. "Tolerance." Tolerance is not enough. Allowing for someone's existence, or behaviour, doesn't build the necessary relationships of trust – across faiths and cultures – needed to tackle the complex and global challenges that our civilisation faces. We need to be honest with and respect one another enough to name our differences and

(Continued on page 15)



Chris Seiple

Filling a gap on Israel

Reviewed by Sol Salbe

Having recently picked up again Robin Rothfield's *Challenges facing Israel at 60*, I was struck by something that seemed paradoxically odd. Rothfield and I were in Israel a year apart but we have seem to have made some very similar observations. It is odd, not because the country had remained still for a year, but because we have such different perspectives. Rothfield is not a sceptical journalistic sabra like this reviewer, but the ultimate Diaspora-Jew lover of Israel. But unlike those usually depicted as the Israel-first crowd, he loves Israel to life, not death.

And it shows; the author of this book may possess rose-coloured glasses but he must have left them in Melbourne, otherwise the tint is almost indiscernible. His preference for the truth, and for speaking his mind, is much stronger than any tendencies to tone down Israel's imperfections.

Rothfield focuses on the people whom the totally secular Shulamit Aloni described as doing *avodat kodesh* (sacred work). These are the relatively small NGOs which tirelessly, and for no reward, work their hearts out for important social causes. There's the obvious case of Adalah – the Legal Centre for Minority Arab Rights in Israel, and the better known MachsomWatch, a group of women who observe the checkpoints in order to make life just a little better for the Palestinians. And the one Aloni said was doing the ultimate form of *Avodat Kodesh*, Yesh Din – a subject of a forthcoming *Newsletter* article. But there are also the lesser known organisations that deal with overseas workers, public health and the environment and much, much more. I feel particularly sympathetic to Kav La'oved (Hotline for [migrant/foreign] workers). Through a security guard's error I ended up spending half a day with a group of such workers waiting to have their work visas renewed. It brought home the point that things can get even worse than they were here under Philip Ruddock.

The common theme of Rothfield's selection is the connection of all the NGOs to the New Israel Fund (NIF). Whether it is his own talent, sheer luck, or the judicious choices of the NIF, he has selected the most important NGOs that people outside Israel should know about. The only one that did not make the cut, perhaps because of lack of links to the NIF, is Ir Amim (City of Nations) which deals with Israeli-Palestinian relations in Jerusalem and environs (and my first recommendation to anyone visiting

Israel). Rothfield provides a brief outline of each NGO's work and ties it in to what he saw himself and the people that he met. He certainly seems to have been persistent in ensuring that he got to the people who provided the full picture.

Some will question the chapter on the writer's own attitude to the Israel/Palestine conflict. No doubt in the broad Australian community someone who can recall himself supporting the 1947 partition resolution will not be everyone's cup of tea. But rightly or wrongly, this book is very much aimed at the Jewish community, and perhaps even those who are a long way removed from AJDS membership. Among that audience, Rothfield's interpretation of the events of 1948 may go down well, even though there are some of us, influenced by the New Historians, who do not subscribe to that view.

Rothfield may have written this book with a different kind of audience than the readers of this *Newsletter* but my advice is that when you buy a copy for a more conservative friend or relative in order to influence *them*, take a sneak look at it yourself. I guarantee that there is a great deal of information here that you simply didn't have previously.



MachsomWatch women on the job

(Continued from page 14)

commonalities, according to the inherent dignity we each have as fellow creations of God, called to walk together in peace and justice, mercy and compassion.

The above words and phrases will differ and change over the years, according to the cultural and ethnic context, and the (mis)perceptions that Muslims and non-Muslims have of one another. While that is to be expected, what counts most is the idea that we are earnestly trying to listen to and understand each other better; demonstrating respect as a result.

[Originally published in the *Christian Science Monitor* via the Council on American-Islamic Relations.]

Quotable

Send us 30,000 scholars instead. Or 30,000 engineers. But don't send more troops -- it will just bring more violence.

Shukria Barakzai, member of the parliament of Afghanistan, on the Obama Administration's plan to dispatch 30,000 additional troops fight in that country.

Christian Science Monitor, March 2, 2009

I cannot believe that one bkie gang was able to close the Qantas terminals, blow up a building in Sydney's eastern suburbs, shut off the electricity in the Sydney CBD and make it rain, all in the one day.

George Meredith, Gordon, NSW (*The Australian*)

Sorry, Madonna Johanson (Letters, 25/3), stranded whales

just aren't suitable for specialist scientific purposes. It should be clear by now that Japanese research requires the harpooned variety.

Stephen Jeffery, Sandy Bay, Tas (*The Australian* 26/03)

Interest rates are the lowest for 49 years. But they would have been even lower under the Coalition.

Terence Bright, Penrith (*SMH* 9/4)

The big four banks make profits of about \$1 million an hour. Each.

This isn't enough?

Chris Routley, Kingswood (*SMH* 9/4)

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