



AJDS Newsletter

Volume 10, Issue 1

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society

February 2009

War in Gaza: our view

There are times when remaining silent is not an option. The aftermath of Israel's Cast Lead operation in Gaza is one of those occasions. The horrific death toll of innocent Palestinian civilians alone makes it incumbent upon Jewish organisations to declare their position, especially when an organisation aspires to be a "Progressive Voice among Jews".

The AJDS views with despair what has happened and declares its opposition to what we have just seen. We cannot engage in folk dancing in Melbourne's streets while others are being slaughtered by the dozen. With sadness we note that not a single community leader has commented upon, let alone condemned, those who, outside Parliament House, were to say the least, oblivious to their enemies' suffering.

We have no truck with Hamas. Their vision for Israel fills us with dread. While we recognise that Hamas's concern for their people is genuine and that Palestinian suffering and despair is very real and needs attention, we totally oppose the firing of rockets at Israeli civilians. They may be far less deadly than the IDF equipment but it is mainly luck that has prevented major catastrophes on several occasions. Our message to Hamas is: seek other methods to campaign for ending the Occupation and achieving Palestinian Independence. There are other more strategic ways to draw the world's attention to this just cause.

The IDF military achievement in being able to operate at will in both rural and urban regions of Gaza while sustaining low casualties may have boosted its own morale. But military success needs to be measured against objectives, and from this point of view the war was a failure. The initial objective of the war was to put an end to the firing of Qassam rockets. This did not cease until the war's last day, and was only achieved after a ceasefire

was already in force. Until then, Hamas was able to sustain a steady barrage into Israel. While estimates vary, Israeli defence officials concede that Hamas has many more rockets and that production is continuing.

The war's second objective was the elimination of smuggling through the tunnels. The initial scepticism about the destruction of the tunnels has been confirmed by the re-bombing of the area by the air force. Several reporters, including at least one from Israel's *Haaretz*, have been able to observe first hand the tunnels in operation within days if not hours of the ceasefire.

If removing Hamas from office, or at least weakening its hold over the Gaza Strip was an objective, then it too was a dismal failure. The vast majority of its fighters avoided combat and were not harmed. Popular support for the organisation has, according to most reliable accounts, increased. This is not a surprise, for similar reactions have been repeated throughout history, from the days of the Blitz to the bombing of Vietnam.

The war's limited gains came at a huge cost. We are appalled at Israel's adoption of the kind of tactics that were used by the Russian army against Georgia and earlier in Chechnya. The use of massive fire power into built-up areas, a method that leaves whole areas demolished at a high cost in civilian lives, is not something that earlier generations of Israeli fighters would approve.

We can only concur with one of Israel's greatest novelists, David Grossman, that military success, such that there was, did not reflect moral justness, only strength. Israel has lost whatever claim to the moral high ground that it had previously. This is reflected in public opinion polls around the world and the way in which ordinary

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Where to for the AJDS?

YOU help us decide

Annual General Meeting special discussion

This year's Annual General Meeting is going to be devoted to discussion of what we can, should, and will do in 2009 and years beyond.

Sunday 8 February 2009, 1590 High Street, Glen Iris

Barbecue at 1.00 pm (BYO meat, salads provided)

Formal proceedings at 2.30pm

Wheelchair access through back. Location is near Route 6 tram terminus.

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society Inc
(Affiliated with the Jewish Community Council of Victoria)

Contact the AJDS!

PO Box 685 KEW 3101

Phone 9885 6260

Executive Committee

Steve Brook

sjbrook1@bigpond.com

Helena Grunfeld

helena_grunfeld@yahoo.com

Renate Kamener

renert2@bigpond.com

Jeremy Kenner

kennerjz@hotmail.com

Sol Salbe

ssalbe@westnet.com.au

Tom Wolkenberg

linton@bigpond.com

Harold Zwier

hz@doublez.com.au

David Zyngier

sndz@bigpond.com

Newsletter Committee

Steve Brook, Margaret

Jacobs, Renate Kamener,

Jeremy Kenner, Vivienne

Porzolt, Dan Rabinovici, Les

Rosenblatt, Sol Salbe (Editor)

Editorial Phone: 9318 3107 or

0417 508496

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...

*This is a disproportionate issue. We have a lot of coverage of the war in Gaza. Opinion was split on the Editorial Committee as to how many pages we should allocate to the war, from a couple of pages to the whole Newsletter. In the end I discovered that we really had no choice in the matter. We were just overwhelmed by the material. There was just so much that needed to be said. We concentrated on those items that you simply would be unlikely to read elsewhere. **The AJDS's own view** derived collectively is on the **front page**. The assertions in that statement are overwhelmingly backed up by the contents of the other articles. Perhaps the only exception is the allusion to the dancing at the pro-Israel rally outside Parliament. The Jewish News reported this embarrassing aspect on the Web but dropped it from the print edition.*

*So what do we include? An analysis of the way a poorly written article in Business Age was used to divert attention from the war (**p5**). **David Rothfield** follows up with a highly original counter argument to "no other country will tolerate rocket attacks" on **page 6** with the AJDS's earlier statement and reaction to it on **page 7**. Two exclusive translations grace the next two pages. Excerpts from an interview with Gaza and Hamas specialist reporter for Israel's Channel 10 **Shlomi Eldar** and an exploration of why his most famous interview, with Palestinian doctor Ezzeldeen Abu al-Aish, moved Israelis in a way that no other Palestinian suffering has (**pp8-9**). While I am at, it many thanks to **Keren Rubinstein** for one of these translations.*

*Other aspects of the war are also covered: the frightening rise of obnoxiously racist religious views within the Israeli military, the "**Georgia rules**" tactics used to demolish whole neighbourhoods, why **Gaza was no Warsaw Ghetto** (with a contribution by **Robert Fisk!**) and finally an exercise in swapping places: How would it be if Hamas were to launch its rockets at the IDF headquarters which just happened to be across the road from the country's largest shopping and office complex. These four articles are on **pp10-11**.*

Is the coverage balanced? No more than our coverage of the Iraq war was. Our readers do not live on a desert island -- they have been exposed to a lot of media from the AJN to Hasbara emails. Had we directed our Newsletter to a Palestinian audience, our choice of material would have been totally different, to counteract what they have been exposed to.

*Still we managed to cover material not relating to the war, from President Obama's inclusive inauguration to his choice of Middle East envoy (**pp12-13**). In our own country, we cover refugee issues, comparing the treatment of boat people by the Fraser and Howard governments (**p4**). The controversy over moving Australia Day (**p4**) and the importance of making the hard choices on climate change (**p14**) round off the issue.*

Whether you approve our choices or not, we have plenty to discuss. Let's do it at the AGM.

Sol Salbe

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members of our community have stayed away from support rallies. No doubt as further information about war crimes and the disturbing intrusion of extremist and racist religious views into the Israeli military permeate into our own community, Israel will end with fewer and fewer supporters, albeit more strident in their tone. It is those who back all Israel's actions who are betraying the country's long-term interest. The era in which leaders can argue that "if you are not with us, you are with the terrorists" is over. It is time for all members of our community to speak up so the full range of views on this issue can be heard.

Like Tony Blair, we believe that rather than trying to ignore Hamas, we favour dialogue and negotiations with a unified Palestinian government that represents most major currents. This would be a big step towards Israel reaching an accord with the vast majority of the Palestinian people, and also with the rest of the Moslem/Arab world.

AJDS Executive

AJDS looking back, looking forward

[Contributed]

There's a fair amount of buzz around regarding the AJDS's future. We look below at some of the questions posed. Naturally this is not a discussion that can be settled overnight or even at an afternoon's sitting, so this is obviously just a beginning.

But before looking at the future we need to look at the past. Our perception of the way we should be heading is influenced by recent experiences. And in our case, a lot of the thinking has been influenced by a slowdown in our level of activity.

Before we go into it, we must reiterate the obvious point that to some extent this was a good thing. At the very end of 2007 we saw a change of government. So there was no need for us to support and attend rallies against Work-Choices. The Rudd government has (sort of) got rid of it. The situation on refugees, another major aspect of AJDS activity, has also improved dramatically with the abolition of Temporary Protection Visas. There is a need for a lot more improvement here too, but the urgency which has been the driving force of our activity has disappeared. There were other improvements in terms of the Apology to the Stolen Generations and the withdrawal (sort of) of Australian troops from Iraq. Progressive organisations experience a slowing down in their activity every time Labor gets elected. But honesty demands that we recognise that nevertheless our activities slowed down more than that.

However there were plenty of successes. Our annual dinner scored ticks on every department: attendance, speaker, atmosphere, you name it. A particularly gratifying factor was the generational change that was seen

among those who both attended as well as introducing and thanking our speaker. We initiated and drove the *Israel at 60* event giving community members a chance to hear something other than the lopsided accounts in events organised by the State Zionist Council, or for that matter, the Palestinian community. We had a prominent Israeli journalist, a young Israeli-Australian artist, a mainstream scholar, a Bundist researcher and a Palestinian activist on the platform – where else could you hear such a range of views? On the negative side, there was no non-Jewish presence in the audience (other than the personal friends of the speakers). In fact during the year we were not over-prominent as a Jewish voice among Progressives. Our sole influence there was in sponsoring the Middle East News Service.

Later in the year we participated in a very successful Rabin Commemoration with Barry Jones speaking. Our own numbers were up on the previous year's event. This was mainly a result of significant attendance by veteran older members on the night.

We had a successful afternoon with MACHSOMWATCH and Yesh Din activist Nura Resh, who certainly left us well informed about the pernicious affects of the Occupation. We conducted one fund-raiser – an outing to *Waltz with Bashir*, which was a great success in terms of both attendance and the impact of the film itself.

Last but far from least, we were able to issue several statements on matters concerning Israel, the Palestinians and our community which appeared in various publications. The best thing about this was that the process of issuing such statements seems to have become more streamlined as we have gone along.

Looking to the future: questions, questions...

So what should the AJDS do? We need new blood in the organisation, for a start. We need a whole new layer of activists to actually do things. It is not enough to attend a meeting (or send an email) suggesting that someone else should do something. We need doers. For various reasons some of the old hands are no longer capable of contributing to the same degree as they once did. So all the following questions are predicated on us finding those new pairs of hands. Otherwise the questions and possible answers will have a very "theoretical" aspect about them.

Increased membership, increased influence or both? Which is more important? And where, in the Jewish or the general community? And how does this affect our relationship with others in the community? Raising the flag and speaking strongly on matters such as the Israeli war on Gaza may well attract new members from among those who have been feeling uneasy about Israel's behaviour in recent years. But at the same time it may drive a wedge between us and those in community leadership positions who cling to past values and attitudes. These may well be the very people we work alongside in joint projects – the people we know from Meretz Australia and the Progressive Judaism movement.

This can be seen as a question of priorities. Several people, in particular Robin Rothfield, have done us a service by highlighting this issue. We have extremely limited re-

sources, relying on volunteers to carry just about every aspect of our work. So what should these priorities be? Members of the Editorial Committee recommended about a year ago that we take advantage of the high quality of our *Newsletter* [they're biased!] and distribute it around the community. We have made very tentative steps in that direction. Others are suggesting that we should actually cut the frequency of the *Newsletter* and undertake special tasks aimed at the more progressive members of our community. Still, there's the view that a modern organisation cannot operate without an electronic presence. A functioning website, AJDS blog(s) and even (gasp!) a presence in social networks like Facebook may be the best way to recruit new people and get our ideas across.

These are only some of the questions. We need the answers and the people who have them are our members. Come to the Annual General Meeting and let's hear your own views!

Membership fees now due

Membership fees for 2009 are well and truly due. We rely on them to keep our organisation going, particularly this *Newsletter*. If your name label is highlighted it means that you are not up to date and you should see to the matter, if possible.

Moving Australia Day: “Over to you, Australia!”

The National Indigenous Times' *Chris Graham* ignited the debate over shifting the date of Australia Day away from 26 January. He reminded the Prime Minister of his party's policy on the subject. That got the ball rolling, and at the end it was clear that date was not likely to be shifted without a major political campaign.

Of course, with the exception of last year's moving Apology to the Stolen Generation, relations between Indigenous Australians and the ALP have never been good. Graham came up with a good turn of phrase: "Labor has made an art form out of promising Aboriginal people the world, and then delivering an atlas."

The point, however, is not any party's promises but the way in which we need to have a national day on a date that can be celebrated by all Australians.

Chris Graham explained why in the *NIT*:

"Here's the argument against retaining the current date: Australia Day is celebrated on January 26 to mark the day the Union Jack was planted on Aboriginal soil, without treaty or agreement. It marks the start of an invasion by the British. It marks the beginnings of the death by slaughter, disease, starvation, poisoning, assimilation and depression of hundreds of thousands of Aboriginal people.

"Only a complete doofus could possibly suggest Aboriginal people should celebrate that. There will always be a few Aboriginal people who participate in Australia Day celebrations. That is, of course, their right. But they are in the absolute minority. The overwhelming majority commemorate and commiserate on January 26.

"If you don't believe me, go the Yabun Survival Day concert in Redfern, Sydney on Monday. Drape yourself in the Australian flag. Stick a fake Boxing Kangaroo tattoo on your cheek. And then start screaming 'Captain Cook – go you good thing!' See what happens.

"But if you want to get a sense of how offensive Australia Day is to Aboriginal people without copping a hiding, try putting yourself in someone else's shoes: How about every April 25, black Australians celebrate the slaughter of our diggers at Gallipoli? The slogan can be 'That's 8,709 fewer white men coming home! Woohoo!'

"It's very offensive stuff, but of course it's not real. Australia Day is, and every year the noses of Aboriginal

people are rubbed in the fact that their land was stolen and their ancestors were killed.

"The argument for moving Australia Day to a more appropriate date is a no-brainer. It might not be a debate we like,

but it is a debate that we have to have. It will not go away while ever January 26 remains our national day.

Indeed, this very issue was the topic of a major speech by NSW

Aboriginal Land

Council chair Bev Manton, and the subject of a protest by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre in Launceston.

"And they won't be alone. As sure as the sun rises, they will be joined and supported in protest by black people all over the nation. It happens every year.

"Despite the betrayals of government, relations between black and white Australians will still slowly improve. We will get things wrong occasionally – the Northern Territory intervention is one example. Wilson Tuckey is another. But history tells us that over time, and in spite of white guilt and resistance, as a society we will evolve.

"In the 1930s, the notion of Aboriginal people having the vote was ridiculous. In the 1980s in Queensland, the government branded the idea of equal pay for black workers unacceptable. In 2000, a national apology to members of the Stolen Generations was unthinkable.

"And just look at us now. So the question then becomes 'At what pace will we evolve?' With or without responsible, courageous leadership from the two major parties, sooner or later Australia will have to sign a treaty with the First Australians. Sooner or later Australia will have to compensate members of the Stolen Generations.

"And sooner or later, Australia Day will have to be moved to a more inclusive date.

"We can do it now, or we can do what we did with the national apology, and behave like brats for a decade, then do it anyway. Over to you, Australia!"



Some may see Australia Day as white and blonde, but all Australians should be able to celebrate it .

Refugees, Fraser and Howard

Pamela Curr

Politics is not always chancy -- sometimes all it requires is to follow an historical precedent that works. The 48,000 refugees accepted by the Fraser government provide a case in point. They arrived by boat, most without documents. Instead of being locked up in punitive conditions in desert detention centres, they were accommodated in hostels, given English classes and assisted into the community where they thrived.

Their children are today working in every area from facto-

ries, business, professions and the arts. They are our fellow Australians, having enriched our community culturally, linguistically, intellectually, financially and gastronomically.

Fast forward to the year 2000 to the Howard government and another political philosophy -- here 20,000 refugees who arrived by boat had their lives put on hold for years while they endured an immigration snakes and ladders game which in the end granted visas to over 95 per cent of its victims. It was costly in terms of the mental and

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The deflection value of Michael Backman

Sol Salbe

Antisemitism, like other forms of racism, is on the rise, but it is simply untrue that this has nothing to do with Israel's actions.

To argue that antisemites are the sole cause of antisemitism makes about as much sense as to contend that anti-Americanism has nothing to do with the behaviour of US governments in Iraq, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama etc. Regrettably, in a "hot" situation (nothing to do with recent Melbourne weather!), Israel's actions can easily be essentialised into "Jewish" behaviour.

This happened with Michael Backman's poorly-written article on what he called the costs of Israel to the West. The Gaza attacks, on top of the ongoing conflict, had become a symbol of religious persecution for Muslims around the world, Backman wrote. Gaza, like other events in the sorry conflict, contributed to terrorist attacks, the growth of Al Qaida, and other forms of Islamic extremism. Backman's key points had already been made by other writers in the west, but without the crudeness which left him open to attack.

Backman unquestionably crossed the racism line in terms of anti-Israelism, while sailing close to the wind in terms of sloppy history and the use of "stingy" Jewish stereotypes. There is a range of views within the AJDS as to whether this was antisemitic or not, but there is a consensus about the racist implications of the article.

There was also a consensus in the public debate on platforms such as Crikey.com.au that the article should not have been published or at least, given a good, hard edit. The blame there, however, was concentrated on the short staffing caused by management cutbacks, which did not allow for proper procedures to be followed.

Much was made of Backman's critique of Israeli backpackers. This was stereotyped, but not exactly inaccurate. *Yediot Acharonot* has said far worse, and even Penguin has published the *Lonely Planet* guide, which says: "If one nationality gets the almost universal thumbs down, however, it's Israelis. Young Israelis, fresh out of the army, are used to being pushy, demanding and aggressive. Perhaps there's a national tendency to argue about prices as well, but in the developing world to get aggressive about saving fifty cents is not going to make you flavour of the month."

The point of course is that the badly-behaved Israeli backpacker is a product of the Occupation and the effects it has on young Israelis who become accustomed to acting rudely. Backman got the cause and effect back to front, particularly in seeming to associate Israeli tourist habits with the rise of international terrorism (but then, what about ugly Americans, or drunken Aussies in Bali?). But the worst aspect of the whole matter was the Jewish community leadership's reaction, which avoided any discussion of why such a half-baked article was published. Instead, it went into a frenzy over perceived antisemitism

by Backman and dereliction of editorial duty by the *Age*.

It was as if the war in Gaza, the 1300 casualties, and over 300 dead Palestinian children did not matter. The perceived antisemitism of the *Age* led to an extraordinarily strong response from the JCCV and ZCV in both letters and what must have been explosive phone calls to the *Age* management. The *AJN* followed suit in its editorials. There was a stream of letters in the *Age*, as well the *AJN*, and apparently many cancellations of subscriptions.

The *Age*'s slip-up has become a useful tool for the increasingly conservative community leadership to deflect attention to one article and cry 'antisemite' rather than continuing to defend the indefensible, Israel's behaviour during the war. At a popular, community level — at least as reflected in letters in the press — sadly, a siege mentality has taken over from any rational discussion of why Backman — someone who does have considerable insight into the Asian Muslim scene -- should even care to write about Gaza.

The inability to understand why there are increasingly strong reactions in the Australian press to Israeli behaviour has become a topic on the horizon for Israeli commentators; that *hasbara* doesn't work anymore, and that traditional justifications and excuses, drawing on Jewish history or what is now called the perceived 'existential threat', no longer cut the mustard even with Israel's good friends. It's costing too much, and there has to be a better way. It's a pity that the communal leadership here is behind the times and can't take that point.



Michael Backman

[Larry Stillman contributed to this report]

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physical health of already traumatised people, as well as dividing the Australian people in the ugliest way. It will be decades before some victims recover, if ever. These include those who suffered the brutality of detention as well the Australians who refused to follow government orders.

The immigration legislation has been so contorted that it is unable to deliver fairness and justice, even now when the best of intentions are at work. The recent amendment to terminate the discriminatory temporary visa has resulted in the ROS (resolution of status) visa. It continues to cripple refugees by denying them access to further education. To attend university they must pay full overseas fees -- unlikely on a refugee wage. Australia, in desperate need for skills, denies a highly motivated group the chance to help. In this area, Australia would do well to return to practices of times past.

[Pamela Curr is the campaign coordinator of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.]

The Gaza in Footscray saga

David Rothfield

Some people have attempted to liken the rocket attacks on Israel fired by besieged Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to a group of imaginary terrorists in inner Melbourne firing rockets on suburban Melbourne homes. "Would we tolerate that?" they ask. This is a local version of an argument that has been spread all over the world.

The analogy however is not only simplistic; it completely ignores the particular circumstances and environment of Gaza and the events that led to the current conflict. On the other hand, with a little bit of imagination we could perhaps embellish the simplistic analogy given, in an attempt to draw some parallels. We might end up with a scenario like the following:

Not-so imaginary scenario

Let's take a closer look at where those "terrorists" in Inner Melbourne come from. Let's say they are from Footscray. They were evicted from their homes in the 50s



Imaginary estate?

to make way for a bonded warehouse and transit depot and rehoused in a Housing Commission estate that has since become run-down and overcrowded. The only saving grace about the place is that there is a small garden and a playground where the children can play, albeit shared by the 2000 residents of the estate. There is no child-care facility and the local school is overcrowded and poorly resourced. Most

mothers have to work to make ends meet, so it is not surprising that youngsters at a loose end resort to vandalism and petty crime to get a bit of cash for themselves and make an impression on their peers.

Needless to say the residents feel cramped and are unhappy there, but successive governments have told them that it was temporary and that they would get the opportunity to move to new housing yet to be built. Forty years of patience and protest, however, have achieved nothing.

Developers

Then along come some developers who want part of the grounds of the estate along the banks of the Maribyrnong River to build town houses for yuppies. To make way for the town houses, the estate residents would lose their garden plots and playground. The residents form a deputation and demand to speak to the Planning Minister, but he refuses to meet them. Planning is approved by the newly amalgamated City of Melbourne-Maribyrnong after the State Government decided in its wisdom that the good citizens of Maribyrnong would be better served

within the Greater City of Melbourne and in any case, for the planned expansion of port facilities, the State Government wants the whole area under one municipality.

When a contractor arrives to erect a fence to separate the estate from the area designated for the new development, the workers are stoned by angry youngsters. The police arrive and the youngsters are arrested and indefinitely detained.

Six months later, the first town house has been completed and the new residents are about to move in. A



Real destruction

swimming pool is also under construction but it will be private, for use by the town house residents only. The driveway off the main road in to the new town house development is adjacent to the access road into the estate, a situation that the planning authority does not approve of for safety reasons. They have decided that the estate access must be moved around the corner into a side street. When roadwork begins to block off their old entrance, a gang of youngsters start a riot. They burn tyres, smash the windows of the new town house and start on their way down the street towards the police station. The police enter the fray and in the ensuing battle 12 youngsters are shot, several of whom later die in hospital. Others are charged and sent to prison. One policeman is badly wounded in the eye by a stone.

Mass demonstration

The deaths of the youngsters bring the entire estate out on to the streets in a mass demonstration. The City of Melbourne announces that no estate residents would be allowed to leave the estate without an ID.

After the riot, the building contractor on the town house project stops work and the developer decides not to proceed.

There is a grand victory celebration in the estate. The residents depose the old welfare committee with its council appointed chairman and they set up a new welfare

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Initial AJDS comment on Gaza war gets responses

The following statement was issued by the AJDS Executive on 31 December:

Many Israelis want their government to prevent the renewed and frightening rocket attacks from Gaza on Israeli southern towns. For various reasons, the government feels compelled to respond. This kind of scenario has played out many times in the past. Israel exacts an enormous price from the Palestinians in the blood of many innocent bystanders in exchange for the rocket attacks.

Unless international action prevents it, there will be a new cycle of violence. Israel has chosen a bloody and dangerous path, the outcome of which may well be to Israel's political and security detriment, just as happened two years ago with its incursion into Lebanon. There will be many innocent dead, but no resolution.

It has been so inevitable, and also so pointless. Israel has virtually imprisoned more than a million Palestinians in Gaza under conditions that have created immense deprivation and desperation. It refuses to negotiate with their leaders, although it did manage to get a ceasefire some six months ago, which was needlessly broken by Israel because of a tunnel.

We don't have a simple solution. The road back to sanity will be a long one. But every time Israel demonstrates its overwhelming military superiority, every time Israel pulls the noose around Gaza tighter, the problem becomes even more intractable. Long term, a resolution can only come through a readiness to talk, seeking a compromise that both sides can live with. Israel holds most of the cards. It can afford to be magnanimous to break the cycle of violence. Accepting a ceasefire by both sides would be a useful first step.

We received several responses

As usual, you have my admiration.

Regards

Peter Barnett [Former head Radio National]

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committee in which the younger and tougher generation have control. The new committee declares that it will not recognise the jurisdiction of the newly amalgamated City of Melbourne-Maribyrnong. They will negotiate with Moonee Ponds Council for the provision of cheaper municipal services instead.

One of the youngsters from the estate who has a cleaning job in a city restaurant is told next day that he is fired. He knows there will be no other work for him and his response is to blow himself up with a petrol bomb in the restaurant. He and several diners are killed. The City of Melbourne then orders that no residents of the estate will be allowed over the Maribyrnong River in to the City.

The City of Melbourne decides to surround the entire estate with a barbed wire fence and place a guard at the only gate 24 hours a day. Only a few selected workers

Well done!

Sol, can you clarify as to who broke the six-months-old ceasefire because others have said it was Hamas?

Robin Rothfield

As a member of the AJDS I can not in all conscience agree with the executive's decision to point the finger more towards Israel than to Hamas who are the obvious cause of the Israeli retaliation. Israel has not virtually imprisoned more than a million Palestinians in Gaza. They have an outlet through Egypt. Hamas has always pledged to annihilate their Jewish neighbour.

You talk of the need for compromise. How can you so confidently blame Israel when Hamas has openly advocated belligerency? Surely you are aware also that Hamas uses "innocent Palestinians" as human shields against Israel. I am surprised that you don't clearly and heavily show recognition of this. Your abridged letter to the *SMH* gives support to the thousands of marchers for the cause of the Palestinians. This is certainly offensive to the vast majority of Jewish people who I am sure care for peace as you claim to do. Like the *Age* newspaper you emphasise Hamas and the death of innocents and obfuscate the motives of Israel's enemies in the Middle East and the UN. I note from world-wide reports that the vast majority of dead were members of the Hamas movement pledged to wipe out Israel. It is sad to read of the civilian casualties. The only solution you give is for the parties to talk and don't acknowledge that this has been tried but to no avail. Those harmless rockets can or will one day be fitted with nuclear devices which will wipe out Israel. How can you with such certainty defend these attacks on the basis of what you call the imprisonment of Palestinians in Gaza? I think your strongly worded statement is too one sided – your policy of appeasement lacks responsibility for the future of the Jewish State.

Itiel Bereson

Good statement, Sol and Steve!

Helen Rosenbaum

can receive passes to go to work. Others lose their jobs. The only ones with work are the handful that Moonee Valley Council employs for on-site maintenance. Water and electricity that come from across the Maribyrnong are cut off except for two hours in the morning and two in the evening.

The estate residents are called "terrorists" by the media and the army is called in to blow up the community centre where there are meeting rooms and other facilities. The bomb blows a hole in the adjacent laundry wall. One member of the new welfare committee, a caretaker, three women and five children who are around the laundry at the time are all killed by the blast. The police, with army backup, declare that they will maintain their siege of the estate and continue hunting down the remaining members of the welfare committee until they are all caught.

The story continues.

The Israeli media: Shlomi Eldar as microcosm

Ofer Matan

Few Newsletter readers will recognise Shlomi Eldar's name, but like lots of other Australians, they may recognise the picture of him talking on Israeli TV to a Palestinian doctor who had just lost three of his daughters. A few days earlier Ha'ir, a weekly supplement to Haaretz in Tel Aviv, published a long feature about him. In many respects it provides a microcosm of most of the Israeli media and its relationship with the Palestinian issue. As their introduction says: "Channel 10 reporter Shlomi Eldar provides living proof that there is nothing more difficult on TV than telling the truth." The following are excerpts from a long article.

...Later he moves to the editing room, a place he would rather be. Material flows in from a myriad of foreign channels. With the assistance of the editor on duty, he compiles a report for the major news bulletin of the day. His eyes are already tired from looking at the horrific frames of bullet-ridden children's bodies. They come in every day but he always filters them out.



Shlomi Eldar

Eldar explains his thinking: "Were I to show those pictures, the Israeli viewers would argue that it's a misrepresentation by Hamas which only takes pictures of children". He denies that there is any intervention by the channel's managers and editors. "There is something anti-Palestinian which is burnt so deeply into the Israeli psyche that even the most horrific sights will unfortunately not change the situation."

Nevertheless, even without those photos, he is an island of sanity in the sea of yeah-sayers in the Israeli media, particularly television, since the beginning of the war in Gaza. He is one of the few who actually provides the casualty figures from there. He maintains contact with Hamas sources there, and goes to the trouble of providing an alternative take on events to that of the IDF spokesperson's. His insistence on referring to the senior Hamas leaders by their name, just like his determination to map out the intricacies of the internal conflicts within the organisation, is seen by the Israeli viewer as esoteric lunacy. If the truth be known, his editors think likewise.

But Eldar does not despair. He continues to analyse happenings with a fair and healthy logic. He dreams of the day in which he can return to Gaza and bring "real news stories that I saw with my own eyes rather than what I heard from someone else." Along that path, he often encounters resistance from his colleagues. "One day after the operation began, Reudor Benziman [Ch. 10 News Director] gathered all the reporters together to a meeting to discuss coverage of the war," he recalls. "Everyone spoke of learning the lesson of the Lebanon war. And then I stood up and said that we should not allow ourselves to be led astray by the military's spins. We should not take the IDF spokesperson as being authoritative – we need to understand that they try to dupe

us. I also said that I was angry with myself because at the very beginning of the war we gave viewers the impression that we 'hit 150 Hamas fighters with our first raid.' The military commentator, Alon Ben-David, stood up and said: 'Hang on a minute, what are you talking about? Anyone carrying weapons is a Hamas person.' I replied that not every hit on a policeman in Gaza is a hit at the terrorist infrastructure. They gave the Israeli public the impression that we hit the Qassam launchers and that simply wasn't the case. These were traffic cops."

No Leftist

Eldar is not motivated by ideological considerations – he is no Leftist, not an activist either and most determinedly: "It is important for me to emphasise that I am no Amira Hass," he says. "I don't operate according to a political agenda and, believe me, you would be most surprised if I told who I voted for in the last two elections. What's true is that I have a problem with the way in which the Israeli media deals with Hamas and the suffering of the people of Gaza. The lack of compassion is driving me crazy...

Do you feel that next to your colleagues, you are an extremist?

"I feel that my own line is moderate, but our media speaks with one voice and therefore every deviation sticks out and is thus very noticeable. I was a guest on Nissim Mishal's radio program alongside [military commentator] Yoav Limor and Ayala Hasson of Channel 1. Yoav jumped on me because: 'I believe Hamas's reports'. He reproached me for my empathy with the Arabic media and Arabs generally. That's precisely the way in which military commentators rally around the flag to press the IDF to get stuck into the other side and kill as many of them as possible. This is what is typified by the defence correspondents – if you rely on far-from-disinterested sources, then you end up going with the flow and starting to sound like them..."

Hanging around with Palestinians

And what has hanging around with Palestinian sources done to you?

"I became more sensitive to their suffering. The difference [with the other journalists] is that I don't tell the public what it would like to hear, and they do. Take this week for example, when the head of Military Intelligence said on TV that Hamas in Gaza lost touch with the external branch in Damascus, when the facts on the ground say something totally different.

"I don't claim that Hamas is a humane organisation. To a degree they are a pack of bastards but it is very comforting to paint them as a Satanic junta of Mafiosi and that is just not a true picture..."

In what way does the Israeli media distort the way it presents Hamas?

"Over and beyond the great exaggeration of its power in the media, it is necessary to grasp that Hamas is a guerrilla movement that operates in cells. And cells by their nature hide in populated areas. You wouldn't expect

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If no Abu al-Aish, he would have been invented

Hagai Matar

It may have been horrible, but the televised death of Dr Ezzeldeen Abu al-Aish's family filled the precise void that existed in the Israeli media throughout the attack on Gaza. The story included all the ingredients necessary to convince Israelis that we're dealing with a victim, with a real man whose life was destroyed by our soldiers, at the touch of a button. Dr al-Aish speaks Hebrew, has worked in Israel, has done some research into the impact of the war on the children of Sderot, opposes Hamas, and has many Jewish friends who will vouch for all this. "I would almost call him a Palestinian Zionist," said radio commentator Gabi Gazit. Adding channel 10's heart-rending live broadcast to the mix, together with Shlomi Eldar's insistence on keeping his call from Gaza on air for several long minutes, we finally had the first real picture of Palestinian suffering, which managed to shock the Israeli public. Suddenly people started sending each other the horrifying link, and the typical "they deserve it, let them have it" line on talkbacks was registering a significant shift.

Abu al-Aish's tragedy is enormous, and he was correctly described as a "modern-day Job" by his friends. But it is hard to avoid the irksome question: why is it just him? Why is it that 300 dead children out of 1,300 total fatalities didn't bother Israelis? Why did the recent renditions of the Kafr Qana [Massacre] not bother anyone?

"Al-Aish" in Arabic means "the living". "Abu al-Aish" is "father of the living". Any father of the living is a man. Indeed, Abu al-Aish is everyman, or more accurately: every Palestinian man in today's Gaza, where dozens of people were killed yesterday. Who are they, what are their names? What are their stories? Is it any less important that we hear about them because they don't speak Hebrew? What of the agricultural labourer who worked in Israel and whose work permit was revoked when Thais, cheaper to employ, were being brought over, is his fate not as interesting? And what if one of the boys who were killed didn't think much about the kids in Sderot, but organised a soccer team to channel the frustration and despair of his friends? And what of the mothers, whose bodies were found by the Red Cross, lying beside their crying children – was their death acceptable because maybe, just maybe, they voted for Hamas in the democratic elections Israel was so insistent they have?

We heard nothing of all these, and hundreds of others,

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them to suddenly build a basis in Sinai and wait for the bombers to arrive. I have known for many years, and I don't think that the entire leadership is hanging around the Shifa Hospital together. They are no fools. There is no chance that they will gather in the same place.

Caring about their people

"Contrary to what it is said here, I don't think that Hamas is a movement which is detached from the people. This is a social movement that rose from the bottom up. I frankly don't believe that they are indifferent to the loss of 100 people. Interpreting their behaviour as that of people who

throughout the operation. They were no more than mere numbers provided by the IDF spokesperson, or alter-



Dr Ezzeldeen Abu Al-Aish at Tel Hashomer Hospital

nately, UNRWA. Similarly, we didn't get a report on every bomb, every destroyed building, every hour without electricity or water in Gaza. Similarly, we remembered eight years of Qassams, but simultaneously spoke of them as years of restraint, forgetting that five of those years were of direct occupation, after more than thirty more, and that during the other three there was a suffocating siege. And again we forget countless military operations that have come before the current one, like "Summer Rains", or the winner of the best military operation title: "Maybe This Time".

And this, in the final analysis, is the real meaning of the separation that Israel promotes, a separation that sees some people and not others, and that knows to forgive and forget a wholesale massacre of certain citizens, and therefore does not understand the deaths of others. This is the essence of racism. Dr al-Aish hopes that at least his daughters' deaths will bring peace. In the meantime a ceasefire has been declared, but everyone estimates it is only temporary, until the next round. But if all the Palestinian daughters killed from now on have names and stories in the Israeli media, perhaps we can avoid the next round and the bereaved father's prayers will be answered.

[First published in the *Left Bank*. Translated from Hebrew by Keren Rubinstein.]

could not give a fig about their own citizens is one of Israel's worst mistakes. They believe in a higher aim: to free Gaza of the siege. They are willing to cop it for that aim. The issue of the crossing is a matter of existing or not for them.

"I don't think that we can sign a Peace Treaty with them now. But negotiations on a local agreement are certainly feasible. Over the years they climbed too high a horse with their demands. But on the other hand they frequently spoke of an agreement that will combine recognition of the 1967 border with a long-term Hudna."

[Translated by Sol Salbe from the *Haaretz* website.]

Religious extremism's deadly input

Sol Salbe

The high rate of civilian casualties in the Gaza war has prompted a flurry of analytical articles. Israeli academic Yagil Levy has pointed out in *Haaretz* that the number of Palestinian civilians killed for every Israeli soldier's death has gone from 6 to 48 (if not much higher when the final figures are available). Levy attributes this to two major factors: the tactics pursued to reduce IDF casualties (see Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff's article in this *Newsletter*) and the increasing role of religious and other hard-liners within the IDF.

"A change in the social composition of the field units increased the presence of religious groups and groups from outlying areas, which overwhelmingly hold hawkish views and decreased the presence of the secular middle class. In addition the army has tended to rely less and less on reservists [who are older and more socially aware -tr.]"

Long-time Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery was more specific: "In the last decades, the state-financed religious educational system has churned out 'rabbis' who are more like medieval Christian priests than the Jewish sages of Poland or Morocco. This system indoctrinates its pupils with a violent tribal cult, totally ethnocentric, which sees in the whole of world history nothing but an endless story of Jewish victimhood. This is a religion of a Chosen People, indifferent to others, a religion without compassion for anyone who is not Jewish, which glorifies the God-decreed genocide described in the Biblical book of Joshua.

"The products of this education are now the 'rabbis' who instruct the religious youths. With their encouragement, a systematic effort has been made to take over the Israeli army from within. Kippa-wearing officers have replaced the Kibbutzniks, who not so long ago were dominant in the army. Many of the lower and middle-ranking officers now belong to this group."

It is not as if there were no evidence for his argument.

After the fighting ceased *Haaretz* reported (in English): "The IDF rabbinate, also quoting Rabbi Aviner, describes the appropriate code of conduct in the field: 'When you show mercy to a cruel enemy, you are being cruel to pure and honest soldiers. This is terribly immoral. These are not games at the amusement park where sportsmanship teaches one to make concessions. This is a war on murderers. *A la guerre comme a la guerre.*'

"This view is also echoed in publications signed by Rabbis Chen Haramish and Yuval Freund on Jewish consciousness. Freund argues that 'our enemies took advantage of the broad and merciful Israeli heart' and warns that "we will show no mercy on the cruel."



Rabbi David Fendel

Happy shall be he who takes the infants and smashes them against the rock: Rabbi Fendel quoting Psalms to soldiers.

Earlier the paper reported in Hebrew only: "Fighters in the paratrooper brigade operating in the northern Gaza Strip received "encouragement visits from two extremist rabbis during a break in the fighting this week. The chief rabbi of Safed, Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, who has been investi-

gated in the past for incitement, and the head of the Hesder Yeshiva in Sderot, Rabbi David Fendel, who told the soldiers that in this war "nobody is innocent" and therefore it is permissible to hit civilians.... Fendel quoted the verse from Psalms that relates to God's revenge in Babylon: "Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock". [Israeli soldiers would have heard it in Biblical Hebrew, which they would have understood to mean something like "crush the infants against the rock".]

There is plenty to fear with the rise of Islamic fundamentalists as a major force on the other side. It is time we started worrying about our own extremists as well.

The "Georgia Rules"

Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff

One reason for the high civilian casualties among the Palestinians has been the methodology used by IDF. Two Haaretz correspondents explain how.

The IDF has inserted a crushing war machine into the Gaza Strip to confront thousands of terrorists and guerrilla fighters who have been preparing for months for a possible invasion. The forces are advancing through built-up, fortified and booby-trapped territory, and in so doing are incurring great risk to themselves.

[Chief-of-Staff Gabi] Ashkenazi had said in earlier discussions that use of major fire power would be inevitable even in the most densely populated areas. The Israeli

solution was thus to be very aggressive to protect the lives of the soldiers as much as possible.

These are "Georgia Rules," which are not so far from the methods Russia used in its conflict last summer. The result is the killing of dozens of non-combatant Palestinians. The Gaza medical teams might not have reached all of them yet.

When an Israeli force gets into an entanglement, as in Sajaiyeh last night, massive fire into built-up areas is initiated to cover the extraction. In other cases, a chain of explosions is initiated from a distance to set off Hamas booby-traps. It is a method that leaves a swath of destruction taking in entire streets, and does not distinguish military targets from the homes of civilians.

Gaza was no Warsaw Ghetto!

South African-based Israeli academic, **Ran Greenstein**, a strong critic of the Occupation, argues against exaggeration and in favour of political clarity:

A little exercise may be of interest. If you Google:

Grozny and "Warsaw Ghetto" you'll get about 820 mentions (Grozny was referred to as "the most destroyed city on earth").

Sarajevo and "Warsaw Ghetto" will get you about 5000 mentions (siege lasted four years, 12,000 dead out of a much smaller population than Gaza).

Gaza and "Warsaw Ghetto" will get you 103,000 mentions...

What kind of "disease of the mind" is revealed by these numbers?

The Warsaw Ghetto nuts would have us believe that someone actually bothered to analyse the specific features of the Gaza attack, and after making careful historical comparisons determined that Warsaw is the best analogy for Gaza, but not for anywhere else. The reality is the opposite: analogy came first, pseudo-historical rationalisations later, if at all. Some people in solidarity campaigns in the west decided long ago that the Nazi analogy is the best weapon against Jewish perpetrators (but not against other perpetrators who come from a different historical background) because, in that way, outrage, anger and frustration could be conveyed effectively: "hit them where it hurts". When the perpetrators are not Israelis, invoking the Nazis would not be effective, and therefore they disappear from the scene: crimes against humanity in the African Great Lakes regions, for example, in which millions of civilians were killed in the last 15 years (a ratio of about 1000:1 civilian dead in much more gruesome circumstances compared to Palestine) never

receive this treatment.

Now, whether this is indeed an effective propaganda strategy is but that it is indeed a propaganda strategy rather than an outcome of historical analysis or even any interest in such analysis seems obvious. Even a cursory look at history would reveal that the specific features of Gaza were present in dozens of similar attacks and war crimes committed by various forces since 1945, and thousands of similar cases throughout history.

To the surprise of many in our own community, the *Independent's* **Robert Fisk** concurs:

I have long raged against any comparisons with the Second World War – whether of the Arafat-is-Hitler variety once deployed by Menachem Begin or of the anti-war-demonstrators-are-1930s-appeasers,... And pro-Palestinian marchers should think twice before they start waffling about genocide when the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem once shook Hitler's hand and said – in Berlin on 2 November 1943, to be precise – "The Germans know how to get rid of the Jews... They have definitely solved the Jewish problem."

No, the real reason why "Gaza-Genocide" is a dangerous parallel is because it is not true. Gaza's one and a half million refugees are treated outrageously enough, but they are not being herded into gas chambers or forced on death marches. That the Israeli army is a rabble is not in question – though I was amused to read one of *Newsweek's* regular correspondents calling it "splendid" last week – but that does not mean they are all war criminals. The issue, surely, is that war crimes do appear to have been committed in Gaza. Firing at UN schools is a criminal act. It breaks every International Red Cross protocol. There is no excuse for the killing of so many women and children. ...Just leave the Second World War out of it.

Hiding among civilians, anyone?

The argument is simple and straightforward. The high number of civilian Palestinian casualties was Hamas's fault, because it operated from within the civilian population. There is no question that there is *some* truth in this argument, as been pointed out by organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Hamas is not a regular army with camps and offices, but a guerrilla organisation which always operates among the population. The same kind of arguments could have been thrown (and were -- by the bucketful) at other guerrilla organisations, from the National Liberation Front in Vietnam to the Mau Mau in Kenya, and even the use of kibbutzim and synagogues by the Haganah has been mentioned more than once.

But several months before the current war, **Yanai**

Yisraeli of the editorial board of Walla!, the electronic portal maintained by *Haaretz's* owners, considered a different scenario:

For the sake of the argument, let us conjure an imaginary situation not that far removed from reality. In this scenario, Hamas has longer range rockets and it starts firing them at Tel Aviv. Sorry, not Tel Aviv, just military targets within the city such as the Kirya military complex. Let us

assume that among the thousands of rockets landing in the Kirya, every so often a few hit the [gigantic] Azrieli Shopping Centre across the road. Among the hundreds of Israeli fatalities under this scenario, about half would be innocent civilians, including women and children. For the sake of argument let us imagine that Hamas apologises for the killing of the innocent and offers humanitarian assistance to look after the injured. At the same time, Hamas adamantly maintains that the main responsibility for the civilian deaths lay with the IDF, which has been hiding among the civilians and is bringing disaster upon the Israeli population (as we have heard argued). Naturally, despite the heavy death toll among women and children, Hamas continues with its massive bombardments (which are aimed "purely and solely" at the Kirya military complex) and thereby "accidentally" kills more and more civilians. If that were to be the case, would Hamas's accidents justify the killing of civilians at the Azrieli Centre? Would apologising for the civilian casualties make it OK? Would we then talk about Hamas' "purity of arms" or call it the "most moral terrorist organisation in the world"? Or would we regard it as pure hypocrisy, of the kind typical of those who shed crocodile tears?

Obama's inaugural address breaks with Bush

Richard Silverstein

Much ink has been expended on Obama's inaugural address. But I have a few observations of my own about it. One NPR commentator remarked on how it diverged so radically from the path Bush laid out in the past eight years, but that it did so

obliquely. There were many passages in which I noted this, including this one criticising Bush's embrace of the national security state. Hearing these words made me realise that virtually all the *sturm und drang* of that time is over. Civil liberties will once again be safe with this new president. The worst excesses of Bush-Cheney are to be rolled back:

"As for our common defence, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals.

"Our founding fathers faced with perils that we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations.

"Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience's sake.

"And so, to all other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and we are ready to lead once more.

"Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions.

"They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use. Our security emanates from the justness of our cause; the force of our example; the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.

"We are the keepers of this legacy; guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort, even greater cooperation and understanding between nations."



"I've seen many presidents come and go, but I've never watched a tableau like the one Tuesday, when four million eyes turned heavenward, following the helicopter's path out of town. Everyone, it seemed, was waving goodbye, with one or two hands, a wave that moved westward down the Mall toward the Lincoln Memorial, and keeping their eyes fixed unwaveringly on that green bird.

"They wanted to make absolutely, positively certain that W. was gone. It was like a physical burden being lifted, like a sigh went up of "Thank God. Has Cheney's wheelchair left the building, too?"

Columnist Maureen Dowd in the New York Times

Obama also gave a magnificent call to the Muslim world, which he couched in the native rhetoric of the American melting pot. Though I don't agree with his characterisation of tribal identity in and of itself being inimical to his vision, I do agree with that overall world view:

"We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth.

"And because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

"To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect."

A National Public Radio commentator noted that this was the first inaugural address which mentioned Judaism, Islam or nonbelievers, for that matter. I have no doubt that Obama felt compelled to add this reference because of the offensive references to Jesus included in Rick Warren's invocation. But regardless of his motivation, it feels wonderful to know that a president embraces "the least (in numbers)

among us." We have had eight years of Christian triumphalism and it is enough. This doesn't mean that America stops being a Christian country. But it means that the leader of the land recognises and values the contribution that minority religions have to make.

The following passage too marks an absolute rejection of eight years of indifference to the world's ills and our responsibility for them:

"And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to the suffering outside our borders, nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it."

[Richard Silverstein is a progressive Jewish blogger based in Seattle.]

Welcome, George Mitchell!

Richard Silverstein

The news that Barack Obama has chosen former Senator George Mitchell as his new envoy with a brief to negotiate a resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict is indeed welcome. Mitchell more than proved his mettle helping negotiate an end to the Northern Ireland conflict.

This is an appointment that neither Israel nor the Israel lobby will like because they will have little opportunity to “play” Mitchell or game the system as they often attempt to do. With a weak President or Secretary of State, it is far easier for both to manipulate US political reality in their favour with the help of groups like the America Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and others. However, we now have a strong president with a clear mandate to effect change in both the domestic and foreign sphere. Mitchell too is a heavyweight who cannot be “played” or spun. He has had previous experience in this field as well having been appointed by Bill Clinton to study the issues and provide advice on how to resolve them.

“He’s neither pro-Israeli nor pro-Palestinian,” said Martin Indyk, a former US ambassador to Israel and an adviser to the Clinton administration. “He’s, in a sense, neutral.”

You can often tell how an appointment is playing out by examining who’s against it. James Besser reports in *Jewish Week*:

“The expected appointment of a special envoy to breathe new life into Israeli-Palestinian negotiations could split the pro-Israel centre while pleasing the Jewish left and outraging the right. The schism could be particularly deep if...President Barack Obama appoints former Senator George Mitchell to the job.

“Some Jewish leaders say the very qualities that may appeal to the Obama administration — Mitchell’s reputation as an honest broker — could spark unhappiness, if not outright opposition, from some pro-Israel groups.

“Senator Mitchell is fair. He’s been meticulously even-

handed,” said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League. “But the fact is, American policy in the Middle East hasn’t been even handed — it has been supportive of Israel when it felt Israel needed critical US support.

“So I’m concerned,” Foxman continued.

“I’m not sure the situation requires that kind of approach in the Middle East.”

“...The fact that he does not have the personal connections to Israel of other leading candidates for the envoy job and his reputation for building relationships with both sides in negotiations worry some pro-Israel leaders who have become accustomed to the hands-off approach of former President George W Bush.”

The director of the Israel Policy Forum, M. J. Rosenberg, also accurately conveys the extreme nervousness of the pro-Israel lobby:

“Major pro-Israel groups tend to favour the kind of mediator with the least prospects of success,” said Rosenberg, a longtime pro-Israel activist. “George Mitchell worries them because he was so successful in Northern Ireland, a success that was built on his persistence and his utterly impartiality...and a deal means Israeli concessions which they have never favoured. The stronger the candidate for envoy or mediator — the more of an honest broker he or she would be — the more uncomfortable they are.”



George Mitchell

Out of the ghettos and into the forests

Reviewed by Red Bingham

Defiance – if you haven’t read a copy of Nechama Tec’s story of Belorussian Jews fighting the Nazis and collaborators, get it and read it. If you haven’t seen the movie *Defiance*, then wait a few weeks and it will be coming to a cinema near you.

Predictably, the release of the movie has spawned reviews that question its timing (given the events in Gaza). At least one reviewer from the (UK) *Guardian* pointed out “the heads of all eight major studios, and so many producers and directors, happen to be Jewish” and went on to draw parallels with Hollywood’s treatment of Moslems. An interesting point perhaps, but largely irrelevant to a film that focuses on a Jewish partisan detachment that successfully fought back in World War Two while keeping alive over a thousand men, women and children who had escaped the ghettos.

The world knows little about the Bielski brothers – not even many Jews have heard of them. However, Nechama Tec’s history, based on exhaustive interviews with surviving partisans, will change all that. When people ask, “Why didn’t the Jews fight back in World War Two?” we can say, “Read *Defiance*”. Dr Nechama Tec chronicles how in 1941, Tuvia Bielski and his brothers Zus and Asael who, were farmers in the Polish/Belorussian village of Stankiewicze, organised a resistance movement whose priority was to save Jews and whose secondary aim was to fight back.

Nechama Tec (maiden name Hela Bawnik) was a child in Poland when the Nazis invaded. Her immediate family went into hiding and survived the war. Her autobiography, *Dry Tears*, deals with her family’s struggle to remain alive by denying their identity. Perhaps that is why she became so fascinated by the Bielski Otriad (partisan detachment

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Climate change: still our biggest issue

David Spratt

As this Newsletter goes to press, some of our members are attending the climate action summit in Canberra that will culminate in a rally designed to coincide with the opening of Federal Parliament. We will get a report on what transpired there later, but in the meantime we asked David Spratt to give us some of his thoughts on the subject. Spratt is the co-author of *Climate Code Red* and a frequent attendee at AJDS functions.

The Government's policy centrepiece, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) will unfortunately mean that Australia's greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, when the scientific imperative is to drive emissions down to zero quickly.

Many specific failures can be identified. Tim Colebatch revealed in the 23 December *Age* that on Treasury modelling estimates, "even with a cleaner, more effective model than the one now adopted, Australia's emissions in 2020 would rise 5.8 per cent above 2000 levels" so that we would pump out more emissions in 2020 than we do now. The key is that "Labor has not committed Australia to cut its emissions by 5 per cent, but to cut its emissions allocation by 5 per cent". While Australia emitted 553 million tonnes of greenhouse gases in 2000 and the government will allocate permits for 525 million tonnes of emissions, Treasury estimated that Australia would emit 585 million tonnes because "the scheme allows companies to use unlimited numbers of permits from other countries instead of our own. And the permits we import will be subtracted from our emissions tally."

And then one needs to look at the plans to increase coal exports and their impact on global emissions. Adelaide University's Professor Barry Brook says the expansion of Hunter coal export facilities means that "\$580 million of taxpayers money (is) being channelled into a handout to the fossil fuel industry that will result in an additional 371 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent being pumped into the global atmosphere each year". Add Peter Garrett's green light for the multi-billion dollar expansion of the Wiggins Island Coal Terminal in Gladstone, and the annual increase in emissions from coal exports jumps to 673 million tonnes. As Brook notes, "these two infrastructure projects, announced in 2008, will result in emissions 17 per cent greater than Australia's total carbon dioxide equivalent annual emissions, and cancel out our 4 per cent reduction by 2020 commitment more than 30 times over."

And an incisive analysis by the Australia Institute shows that the cap also establishes a "floor" which effectively eliminates any incentive to reduce emissions below the carbon budget. "When emissions trading comes in, every tonne of carbon dioxide saved by households (through efficiencies) simply frees up a tonne that can be used by industry," said the institute's executive director, Richard Denniss.

Global warming has become so dangerous that it is no longer a question of how much more the world can continue to emit, but how quickly we can reduce emissions and cool the planet.

Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Europe's leading climate scientist and adviser to the German government and the EU, told *Deutsche Welle* on 29 December 2008 that the threats posed by climate change are worse than those imagined by most governments, that previous predictions about climate change and its catastrophic effects were too cautious and optimistic and that "We are on our way to a destabilisation of the world climate that has advanced much further than most people or their governments realise."

The complete loss of the Arctic sea-ice in summer is now inevitable.

"The Arctic Ocean could be nearly ice-free at the end of summer by 2012", says Dr Jay Zwally, a glaciologist at the NASA Goddard Space Flight

Centre. He concludes that: "The Arctic is often cited as the canary in the coal mine for climate warming... and now as a sign of climate warming, the canary has died."

The danger is that an ice-free state in the Arctic summer will kick the climate system into runaway warming and create an aberrant new climate state many, many degrees hotter. The Arctic sea-ice is the first domino and it is falling fast. Other dominos, including catastrophic levels of carbon release from warming permafrost in Siberia, will inevitably fall unless we stop emitting greenhouse gases and cool the planet to get the Arctic sea-ice back.

The scientific imperatives mean we must aim for zero emissions and cooling to return our planet to the safe-climate zone; we face a sustainability emergency and speed is of the essence in constructing a post-carbon economy as fast as possible. An imaginative, large-scale "emergency" programme comparable in scope to the "war economy" is required.

In the Second World War the major players spent one-third or more of their economy on the war. Nicholas Stern says global warming impacts will be worse than the two world wars and the Depression put together, yet today talking about spending just 1, 2 or 3 per cent of our economy on global warming is not even on the public agenda, let alone a third if it should become necessary.

Our political leaders are not taking the actions that the science demands, because the conventional mode of politics is short-term and pragmatic. They promise something for the environment lobby and something for business. But solving the climate crisis cannot be treated like a wage deal. It is not possible to negotiate with the laws



Australia will have to export less coal to fuel power stations

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of physics and chemistry. The planet cannot be bought off.

There are absolute limits that should not be crossed, and doing something, but not enough, will still lead to disaster.

This they simply appear not to understand at all. Political pragmatism, window dressing and incremental solutions that will fail take precedence over the scientific imperatives.

We face a spectacular failure of political imagination. What we lack is political leadership from the big parties,

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with the Russian army) who lived and fought as Jews at a



Daniel Craig in Defiance

time when to do so was nearly impossible. Dr Tec's online biography details many of the themes in *Defiance*: her "research and publications have concentrated on the intricate relationships between self-preservation, compas-

sion, altruism, rescue, resistance, cooperation, and gender. She is currently working on two books, *Profiles of Women* and *A Comparative Study of Jewish and Non-Jewish Resistance*.

Defiance is not *Mila 18*. *Mila 18* by Leon Uris and *Schindler's Ark* by Thomas Keneally were both excellent novels but that's what they were – novels. Both were well researched and largely based on real events, but you will find them in the fiction part of the library. *Defiance* is definitely non-fiction. Dr Tec's blend of historical and sociological research is detailed, and the reader will come across passages that have been repeated, comments about how accounts differ and comparisons of differing power relationships within the forest community. While these can be a little dry at times and can interfere with the flow of the narrative, it gives the book its historical integrity. You'll still be turning the pages till the end to find out what happened to everyone. And the news there is pretty good – the Bielski *Q*triad had an attrition rate of only 5 per cent (an estimated 49 out of 1,200) and remarkably, no one died of starvation despite living in forests for three years.

The film *Defiance* opens in Australia on 26 February.

Calendar, announcements

Thursday, 19 February, 7.30pm. Jewish Museum public program: **Passions, Politics and Parties in Collision -- The Bund and the Communists in pre-war Melbourne.** Speakers Dr Philip Mendes, Dr June Factor and Michael Gawenda. **Gross Gallery, 26 Alma Rd St Kilda. Bookings essential: Tel 8534 3600.**

Dear World:

We, the United States of America, your top quality supplier of the ideals of liberty and democracy, would like to apologise for our 2001-2008 interruption in service. The technical fault that led to this eight-year service outage has been located, and the software responsible was replaced November 4.

Early tests of the newly installed program indicate that we are now operating correctly, and we expect it to be fully functional on January 20. We apologise for any inconvenience caused by the outage. We look forward to resuming full service and hope to improve in years to come. We thank you for your patience and understanding,

Sincerely,

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Quotable

Given their pressing need to do something drastic to cure the banking industry, perhaps Messrs Rudd and Swan should get out the ouija board and have a chat with Ben Chifley.

David Halliday, Dorrigo, NSW *The Australian* 22/01

If what John Lennon said back in 1966 remains true, Jesus is now in third spot.

Jim Dewar, North Gosford (*SMH* 24/01)

'Why rush to throw another \$350 billion of taxpayer money at the Wall Street bandits and their political cronies who created the biggest financial mess since the Great Depression? And why should we taxpayers be expected to double our debt exposure when the 10 still-secret bailout contracts made in the first round are being kept from the public?'

Columnist Robert Scheer, (San Francisco Chronicle 14/01)

Optimists

Multi-layer Phoenicia P3 Safety glass -- don't wait for the next war, install it now.

An advertisement by Phoenicia Glass in the Israeli press.

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