Antisemitism
Principal Themes in Contemporary Antisemitic Discourse

AUSTRALIA - ISRAEL RELATIONS

THE NEW SHERIFF
Ascent of Ambassador Nikki Haley signals a new era at the United Nations
IN THIS EDITION

PETER WERTHEIM
is the executive director of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and was previously a lawyer for 32 years. He acted for successful complainants in several landmark racial discrimination cases.

ALEX RYVCHIN
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GIDEON TAYLOR
is Chair of Operations for the World Jewish Restitution Organization, which represents world Jewry in pursuing claims for the recovery of Jewish properties seized during the Holocaust in Eastern Europe.

WELCOME TO THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH QUARTERLY

“the organisation has long been at the forefront of campaigns that have materially altered the lives of Australian and international Jewry”

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry has been a pillar of Jewish life and indeed, Australian public life, since its formation in 1944. As the peak body representing Australian Jews and the Australian affiliate of the World Jewish Congress, the organisation has long been at the forefront of campaigns that have materially altered the lives of Australian and international Jewry. The liberation of the Jews of the Soviet Union, the unending struggle against the protean phenomenon of antisemitism, and the establishment and maintenance of bipartisan support for Jewish national rights among our political class, stand out as the ECAJ’s most critical endeavours. The ECAJ has also contributed to some of the leading public debates of the day from multiculturalism and racial vilification laws to foreign policy and religious freedom.

With the launch of the Australian Jewish Quarterly, the ECAJ will contribute robust analysis of the issues of greatest concern to Australian Jewry, from our staff writers and from our partners abroad. In addition to this, we aim to create an engaging and interactive experience for our readers by inviting submissions, letters to the editor and questions directed to the ECAJ, which will be answered publicly in subsequent editions.

The Australian Jewish Quarterly, as the home of essential commentary and analysis on national and foreign policy, will continue and enlarge the ECAJ’s tradition of contribution to public and intellectual life in this country.

Welcome.

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LEHITRAOT, DAVE AND FAREWELL, SHMUEL

The Australia-Israel relationship has been enriched by a long line of wonderful ambassadors to Israel but it is difficult to recall someone with the passion, energy, warmth and diplomatic prowess of Ambassador Sharma. He will be long remembered in Israel and in the Australian Jewish community for his tireless and successful efforts to deepen the bonds between Australia and the Jewish state. As he finishes his studies in the Holy Land, our community should reflect on Ambassador Sharma’s contribution and the great debt we surely owe to him.

Like his Australian counterpart, Israel’s ambassador to Australia, Shmuel Ben Shmuel will leave a lasting impression on the Australian Jewish community and on the Australia-Israel relationship. Under his stewardship, bilateral ties in trade, defence, innovation, tourism and academic exchanges have all flourished. Shmuel returns to Jerusalem at an exciting time with the centenary of Beersheva and the Balfour Declaration ahead of us not to mention the 50th anniversary of the 6 Day War. Shmuel and his eminent team leave our shores with the bond of friendship between Australia and the Jewish state. As he finishes his tireless and successful efforts to deepen the bonds of the Australia-Israel relationship, his outstanding contribution and the great debt we surely owe to him.

THE NEW SHERIFF

In keeping with the theme of new ambassadorial appointments, something must be said of Nikki Haley. When President Donald J. Trump appointed the Governor of South Carolina to be the United States’ 29th Ambassador to the United Nations, the Jewish world reacted with thinly veiled euphoria. Haley has long been a staunch and unwavering ally of Israel and her sensible yet robust manner of advocacy lends itself impeccably to the United Nations, a theatre routinely debased by empty, repetitive sloganeering and grotesque selectivity and double-standards. So wayward and vacuous has the United Nations become in many of its functions that one of its most revered institutions is the General Assembly, which is comprised of 18 Arab states, and so on. The second lesson to be drawn is that under Nikki Haley’s watch, this crap just won’t be tolerated any more. It won’t deter the anti-Israel movement, their pathology is permanent, but it will make their lives harder and the battle for truth and justice a little bit easier.
CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The Jewish Quarterly is accepting submissions on all subjects relating to Australian politics, the Jewish world or the Jewish state. Submissions or brief pitches can be sent to the editor at aryvchin@ecaj.org.au. Please include the word “Submission” in the subject line.

WHAT TROUBLES YOU

Each week we will take questions from our readers, a diverse selection of which will be answered in the subsequent edition by a member of the ECAJ executive or senior staff. Questions can relate to communal affairs, Israel, racial discrimination, Jewish continuity, whatever troubles you. Questions can be submitted via email to aryvchin@ecaj.org.au with the word “Troubles” in the subject line.

DISTRIBUTION

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THE MOST IMPORTANT BOOK ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT SINCE ALAN DERSHOWITZ’S, “THE CASE FOR ISRAEL” – Governor Mike Huckabee

“CHILLING, ESSENTIAL READING” – New York Post

“Outstanding, well-reasoned exposé that strikes at the rotten heart of the anti-Israel movement” – Brendan O’Neill, author and editor of Spiked

AVAILABLE IN HARD-COVER AND EBOOK IN JUNE 2017
Israel is no longer a local success story. Its strong and consistent economic growth, fostered by a unique culture of innovation and entrepreneurialism, has found favour around the world.

Plane-loads of international business people, representing companies big and small and countries from Asia to the Americas, are flocking to Israeli cities, making contacts and capitalising on new commercial opportunities.

Our delegation was no different.

Accompanied by the CEO of Australia’s Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) and a collection of Australian energy companies and clean tech entrepreneurs, we saw first hand Israel’s incredible innovation across solar, water, cyber, and drone technology.

We visited the 121 megawatt Ash dulim Solar Thermal Power Plant in the Negev Desert which when fully operational later this year will supply 120,000 homes with renewable energy and save 110,000 tonnes of carbon emissions each year.

With more than 50,000 computer-controlled mirrors that reflect the sunlight on to a boiler sitting above a 200-metre tower, it will be the tallest and fifth largest plant of its kind in the world.

As we in Australia advance our plans for the first solar thermal plant, to be located in Port Augusta, there is much we can learn from the Israeli experience.

Indeed Israel’s leadership in solar is nothing new because back fifty years ago Israel pioneered solar water heating systems which were used in one in twenty homes, and in the 1970s Ormat Industries developed one of the world’s first solar power stations near the Dead Sea.

Today it’s a new generation of start-ups like Solarus Energy which has developed a floating solar power plant that reduces cost as the fresh, salt or waste-water surface helps cool the panels; or Sol Chip a Haifa-based company which has achieved a world-first solar battery that can recharge itself; or Pythagoras Solar which has developed solar cells that can be encased within a pane of glass creating photovoltaic windows integrated into a building.

But it’s not just solar technology that offers opportunities for collaboration between Australia and Israel. Pumped hydro is another exciting area as well.

We met the executives at Gilboa Pumped Hydroelectric Power Station in northern Israel, which will see 300 megawatts of power generated by moving water between an upper and lower reservoir, storing nearly 2.5 million cubic metres each.

Australia currently has three pumped hydro facilities and is keen to do more with the Turnbull Government announcing new feasibility studies for projects in Queensland, Tasmania and Snowy Hydro 2.0.

Wave power technology is another area where companies in both countries are breaking new ground.

Having successfully harnessed the power of the ocean to generate electricity, Eco Wave Power based in Tel Aviv has projects underway in the United Kingdom, Mexico, China and Chile and is one of more than 20 Israeli companies that are intending to list on the Australian Stock Exchange and join the 13 companies already listed there.

Another leading company that we had the opportunity to visit was Airobotics, a specialist in drone technology solutions.

The development of drones to collect environmental data for Australian authorities, whether in Antarctica, over our National Parks, the Great Barrier Reef or in the aftermath of a major storm or cyclone is enormous.

While in Israel I also met my ministerial counterpart Environment Minister Ze’ev Elkin to sign a joint declaration for cooperation on environmental protection.

This will be important in setting a framework for our respective departments to share data and expertise across a range of areas including biodiversity, waste management, coastal management, air quality and species protection.

The question has to be asked why is Israel, a relatively small country with little endowment in the way of rich natural resources, generating so many new ideas and successful start-ups?

THE REASONS ARE MANY.

First, Israel leads the OECD for R&D spending, with 4.25 per cent of GDP going towards these endeavours.

Second, necessity is the mother of all invention, and Israel's existential need for military superiority is breeding generations of creative thinkers with skills that span cyber, engineering and manufacturing capabilities.

Third, there is a culture of risk taking where failure is not an end in itself but a launching pad for new learnings.

It is the combination of these factors that sees Israel today home to more than 275 multinational R&D centres and the highest amount of venture capital activity on a per capita basis anywhere in the world.

Indeed in 2016, Israel saw a record $3.5 billion in private equity investment, an increase of 14 per cent on the previous year.

My visit also coincided with two important dates on our respective calendars, Yom HaShoah and Anzac Day.

It was very moving to attend Yad Vashem with the Israeli President and Prime Minister to remember all those who tragically died during the Holocaust, and I am proud to say this year Australia has joined with the United States and Canada in co-sponsoring a United Nations event to commemorate Israel’s Holocaust Memorial Day.

On Anzac Day I joined fellow Australians at the war grave cemetery at Mount Scopus where almost 2,000 Commonwealth soldiers are buried, while also paying a visit to Beersheba where later this year in October Prime Ministers Turnbull and Netanyahu will mark the 100th anniversary of the 4th Light Horse Brigade breaking through Turkish defences, contributing to the end of the Ottoman Empire.

This was the not the last time that Australia played a significant role in developments in the Middle East, for 30 years later we were the first country to vote in favour of the 1947 UN partition resolution which ultimately led to the creation of the State of Israel.

Since that time, successive Australian Governments of both political persuasions have been a steadfast supporter of Israel at the bilateral and multilateral levels. In many cases joining a distinguished but small band of countries willing to support Israel in the face of one-sided and biased resolutions against it in the UN.

Still to this day Australian defence personnel are in the Sinai and on the Syrian border helping to keep the peace. We are there for no reason other than to promote peace and security in a way consistent with our values as we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our friends in Israel.

Australia’s bilateral ties with the State of Israel are deep and diverse, strong and enduring. Importantly today there is a new chapter opening in the relationship with Israel’s high-tech revolution providing opportunities for collaboration and partnership.

Our recent visit discussing energy and environment issues was very productive and I am confident will continue the momentum to the mutual benefit of our two great nations.

Josh Frydenberg is the Member for Kooyong and the Federal Minister for the Environment and Energy.
International affairs
We must rediscover our conscience and act on this horror now

Peter Wertheim
First published in RendezView

If people today ever think about the war years or about the dreadful genocide of the Jewish and Roma peoples that was perpetrated under the cover of war, it is so divorced from their own personal experiences that it is utterly beyond their range of comprehension.

Herein lies a dilemma. There have been no events that are truly comparable to the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis – the calculated, industrial-scale attempt to eradicate an entire people as an end in itself. Yet we also want the world to remember, understand, and to draw the appropriate lessons from that time, so that we can keep alive at least the possibility that human society will avoid repeating the worst mistakes of the past, and perhaps even evolve into something better.

The need for memory and understanding was highlighted this week by yet another appalling incident in the dismal six-year-long civil war in Syria. During a Syrian government air strike in Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib province on April 4, a combination of outlawed toxic gases, including the nerve agent Sarin, is believed to have been released, killing at least 72 people, including 20 children, and wounding 200 others. It was reported that further government air strikes hit a hospital treating the injured.

The Syrian regime, backed by the governments of Russia and Iran, has tried frantically to deflect the blame for this incident on to anti-government rebels, claiming that it was an attempt by anti-government rebels to destroy a hospital treating the injured. The Syrian regime, backed by the governments of Russia and Iran, has tried frantically to deflect the blame for this incident on to anti-government rebels, claiming that it was an attempt by anti-government rebels to destroy a hospital treating the injured.

The roots of the conflict are not difficult to understand. In March 2011, Syrians took their cue from popular uprisings in other Arab countries and rose up to overthrow the tyrannical regime of Bashar al-Asad. He and his father had maintained themselves in power for decades by massacring, torturing and oppressing their own people. Enjoying minuscule popular support, the regime would have quickly been toppled. Instead, it has been propped up by the massive military intervention of Russian and Iranian forces, including the Iranian-backed Lebanese terrorist group, Hezbollah. The Asad regime serves as a useful proxy for the regional and wider interests and ambitions of Putin’s Russia and the Ayatollahs’ Iran. They too bear the mark of Cain on their foreheads.

Other regional players, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have weighed into the conflict, each pursuing its own interests through local proxies. As Syria disintegrated, rival terrorist groups also emerged, most notably Islamic State in 2014 adding to the mass killings, rape, torture, beheadings, attacks on hospitals, barrel bombs and other horrors. The cruelties in the conflict know no bounds. Ceasefres and agreements have come and gone, and the Syrian people are further away than ever from being able to choose and form their own government.

The reason for the blame shifting from Russia and Syria concerning the latest gas attack harks back to 2013 when it was established that the Asad regime had used chemical weapons against its own people in a Sarin gas aerial attack on the rebel-held Ghouta area of Damascus. More than 1300 people were killed. The UN said the perpetrators probably had access to the stockpile of sarin held by the Syrian military at the time, as well as the expertise to use it.

In international law, the ban on the production, stockpiling and use of chemical and biological weapons is absolute. In contrast to other types of weapons, such as incendiaries, there are no exceptions.

Following the 2013 attack, there was a clumsy attempt by US President Obama to commit the US to the use of force against the Asad regime in order to deter it from further use of chemical weapons. However, the US President was left out on a limb when the US Congress and America’s major ally, the UK, refused to support the use of force. President Obama had drawn a “red line” (his terminology) and Asad had crossed it.

The situation was partly retrieved by a legally binding resolution, passed unanimously by the UN Security Council, which required Syria to open itself up to UN weapons inspectors and to co-operate with them in the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal.

A UN team supervised the surrender of Syria’s sarin supplies, the removal of which was supposed to have been completed early in 2014. However, a portion of the stockpile was reportedly not declared to the UN inspectors. It is likely that some chemical weapons were smuggled out of Syria and some of them may have been entrusted to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

What has been worse than the
ineffectual efforts of the UN to
end the carnage and the descent
into international lawlessness has
been the relative indifference of
western public opinion. To be sure,
western governments have
condemned in appropriate terms
the atrocities committed by
various parties at various times,
including the latest gas attack. Yet
there are few street protests,
public meetings, academic
conferences and the like.

The absence of passion in the
face of overwhelming suffering is
a standing indictment of the
contemporary political left in
particular, mired as it continues to
be in the moral paralysis of post-
colonial self-loathing. It does not
need to rediscover its voice. It
needs to rediscover its conscience.

No attempt to explain the
current position of Syria’s people
can do justice to the depth of their
agony: Syrians have been in the
throes of a massive convulsion in
their lives that all too often has
included their ruthless
displacement from their homes
and brutal separation from their
loved ones, and ended in their
wholesale slaughter. They are no
more in a describable “position”
than a speck of dust in a cyclone
or a droplet of water in a tsunami.

Nor can facts alone convey
adequately the nature of the
injustice now being perpetrated
in Syria. Think of the facts
behind the facts, of the rivers of
tears and the streams of blood,
the final frantic gasps of gas
attack victims, the unending
despair in millions of hearts. Try
to think the last thoughts of
parents as their children watch
them being butchered, or vice
versa. Feel the feelings of
a mother holding her sick
and starving child as it slips
to death.

If it’s facts alone that impress
you, you will find only a few of
them stated here. Use your
imagination, friend, and for the
love of humanity, take action now.
National policy

The Jewish community’s position, explained:

By Peter Wertheim

1 Sections 18C and 18D of the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) balance the right to freedom of expression with the right for minority groups to be free of race hate speech. A similar balancing against the right of free speech occurs in defamation law and there is no campaign to abolish those laws. Most Australians believe in a fair go for all and mutual respect.

2 Section 18C of the RDA makes it unlawful to do an act, otherwise than in private, that is reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate persons by reason of their race, colour or national or ethnic origin.

A. there is no contravention of section 18C unless the offence, insult, humiliation or intimidation is found to have “profound and serious effects, not to be likened to mere slights” (Creek v Cairns Post Pty Ltd [2001] FCA 1007 at [16] per Kiefel J);

B. “reasonably likely to” has been construed without exception as an objective test not a subjective test thereby excluding the capricious perceptions of the complainant or witnesses (Triagan v Trustees of the Toowoomba Sports Ground Trust [2000] FCA 1615 at [15], Creek v Cairns Post Pty Ltd [2001] FCA 1007 at [12], Jones v Scully (2002) FCA 1080 at (98),(101)); and

C. “offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate” have been treated by the courts as a single descriptor, although there have been cases in which contraventions have been found only of “offend, insult”.

3 Section 18D sets out a series of exemptions - academic and artistic works, scientific debate and fair reports or fair comment on matters of public interest are exempt from liability under section 18C if done “reasonably and in good faith”.

A. Section 18D was pleaded in Eatock v Bolt [2011] FCA 1103 (the Andrew Bolt case), but the Judge rejected this defence. The articles were found to contain “errors of fact” and “distortions of the truth”. There was no appeal against those findings;

B. The contravention of section 18C in the Andrew Bolt case was not due to the topic of the articles. See Summary of Judgment at para [30]); and

C. Bill Leak would almost certainly have been able to successfully invoke s18D, in respect of his controversial cartoon. The complaint was withdrawn within a short time.

4 Section 18D has prevailed over 18C on numerous occasions in the courts, ie 18D works in practice and not just in theory.

5 Sections 18C and 18D have been applied in court cases since 1995 without controversy, except among a limited number of people in the Andrew Bolt case and the QUT Case, which was thrown out late last year. (The complaint against Bill Leak never got to court).

6 The 18 recommendations made by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, deal only with complaints handling and early dismissal processes and procedures. If adopted, as they should be, they will ensure no repetition of the problems associated with either the QUT case or complaint against Bill Leak.

7 There is no evidence that the percentage of vexatious or unmeritorious cases that are commenced under section 18C of the RDA is higher than under any other statutory regime for relief, such as the law of defamation, copyright, consumer protection and trade practices. Very few cases ever make it to court. In 2015-16, 77 s.18C complaints were made to consumer protection and trade practices. Very few cases ever make it to court. In 2015-16, 77 s.18C complaints were made to

8 Under s 18C, the likelihood of offence, insult, humiliation or intimidation on the ground of race (the objective test) is gauged from the perspective of a reasonable member of the group which was the target of the alleged contravention, rather than that of the more generic reasonable person. Senator Fierravanti-Wells has proposed that the latter standard (the person on the Bundi tram) should apply. This would have serious problems:

A. A generic “reasonable person” is not in a position to make a fair assessment of what is reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate a particular minority group, because he or she by definition would not have sufficient background knowledge and insight into the particularities of a minority group that has allegedly been targeted with racism to make an informed assessment;

B. If the complainant is a member of a minority community that happens to be unpopular in the wider community at the time of the complaint, that unpopularity might be a factor in applying the more generic community standard. That would be unjust. Section 18C is not needed to protect members of minority groups who are popular in the wider community. It is needed to protect members of vulnerable and, in particular, unpopular minorities;

C. Under the existing law, the assessment is made by a reasonable member of the targeted community, that is, by a member of that community who is neither overly sensitive nor overly thick-skinned. This is both more logical and fairer.
MPs Tim Wilson and James Paterson have proposed replacing the words “offend, insult, humiliate” in s.18C with the word “harass”, so that it would be unlawful only to “harass or intimidate” people because of their race. This is bad policy and bad politics. It would substantively change the section. It would have to substantially change the sections’ construction by the courts, resulting in more litigation, not less. In addition:

A. Harassing or intimidating other people is generally regarded as criminal behaviour. For example, Chapter XI of the Western Australian Criminal Code Act 1913 makes it a criminal offence to “create, promote or increase animosity towards, or harassment of, a racial group or a person as a member of a racial group”. If this is done with intent, the offence carries a 5-year prison sentence (section 77). If not, it carries a 5-year prison sentence (section 78).

B. Citizens should be protected against harassment and intimidation by the State, not by having to expend their private resources via a s.18C case. Harassment and intimidation caused by racism is a social problem, not a private dispute.

C. Replacing the words “offend, insult, humiliate” with the word “harass” would leave vulnerable minority groups without a remedy against serious and ugly forms of racist hate speech. (For examples, see Appendix to the submission made by Executive Council of Australian Jewry to the Parliamentary Inquiry into freedom of speech: http://www.ecaj.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ECAJ-Submission-to-Parliamentary-Inquiry-into-Freedom-of-Speech-6-December-2016.pdf)

D. The case law (including the QUT case) contradicts the contention that the use of the word “offend” in s.18C sets the bar too low – see 2a above;

E. The word “offend” or “offensive” appears in a variety of other laws, including the criminal law, yet the effect is not considered to be controversial. Indeed, the words “offend”, “humiliate” and “intimate” in section 18C were copied from the definition of sexual harassment in sub-section 28A(1) of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth).

F. The word “offensive” is also used in sections 471.12 and 474.17 of the Criminal Code 1995 (Cth), which make it unlawful to use a postal service or a carriage service to menace, harass or cause “offence”. State criminal laws also proscribe certain types of “offensive” behaviour.

NATIONAL POLICY

9

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights was unable to reach a consensus, or even a majority opinion, in favour of either Senator Ferravanti-Wels’ proposal or the Wilson/Paterson proposal, or indeed any other proposals for amending sections 18C and 18D. Its recommendations were all limited to suggested reforms to the complaints-handling process, rather than changing the legislation itself. This is the sensible way forward. The problems identified by the QUT case and the Bill Leak complaint all related to deficiencies in the process. The government’s reforms should, as the Inquiry recommended, address the identified problems (ie the process), which have across the complaints-handling process can be reviewed in 2 or 3 years’ time.

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RACIAL VILIFICATION

In personam

Alex Byschin

First published in the Guardian

In 1992, I was nine years old and living with my late brother and parents in an apartment in Randwick in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. We had arrived in Australia four years earlier as refugees from the former Soviet Union. The status of Soviet Jews as a persecuted minority group had been recognised on the basis of institutional discrimination, which imposed entry quotas on Jews to many universities, inhibited their entry into various professions and totally denied them the right to practise their faith.

As cruel and unjust as the state-sanctioned discrimination against Jews in the Soviet Union was, the every day, casual racism stung more. Ask any Soviet Jew about their experiences and they will recall with unhealed sorrow and pain the humiliation they suffered daily on public transport, in the schoolyard, in the workplace. They will tell you about the fear and debasement they felt when reading stories in the state press about the cunning agitators and capitalist speculators, always given caricatured Jewish names, undermining the state from within.

We thought that dark chapter of our lives had been permanently sealed when we came to Australia and, for the most part, it has been. We live freely in this great land and are thankful for it daily.

But above us in that apartment in Randwick we came across someone intent on importing foreign prejudices and in reminding us that, in spite of our studied efforts to integrate into our new society, we were not welcome.

I began one day with bellowing rants from his balcony, which sat directly above ours, about “the Jews”. I remember well the deep bass of his voice, mocking in tone and utterly terrifying in pitch as he would lament that “Hitler did not finish the job.” I would read many years later about the Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel’s observations of the Soviet Jews when he travelled there in the 1960s. He recorded seeing fear etched on every Jewish face, without exception.

As a boy of nine I needed only to look at the terror-stricken faces on my parents at that moment to see what Wiesel had said.

The abuse would continue daily for months. “I will finish the job,” was frequently added to the critique of Hitler’s unfinished genocide. The police were called many times. My parents beseeched them not to wait until he acts but were told each time that, until an act of violence occurs, his mere words were outside the operation of the law.

There was no 18C then and in truth I do not know if it would have provided us adequate comfort or protection. Legal processes are invariably cumbersome and rarely do they fully erase the loss that has been suffered. But what is clear is that to remove existing prohibitions on racist hate speech, to make lawful the public humiliation of others on the basis of their ethnicity would be a dark and retrograde measure. It would articulate a new official position of laxity towards racism. Such a move would be unbecoming of our great and liberal nation.
JEWISH LIFE

NOT YET

Why Jews Remain a People of Hope

Alex Ryzchin

First published by the ABC based on a guest lecture delivered at the Australian Catholic University

As Jews a hopeful people? Certainly our history gives us little reason to be hopeful. Slavery, exile, the loss of our homeland, oppression by cruel empires, destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (twice), pogroms, blood-libels, show-trials, Holocaust. Not a great deal of cause to be hopeful about the nature of man or about what may lie ahead.

Then I thought about our humour. Humour, after all, is reflective of culture, inner stirrings and worldview. Jewish humour is known for being decidedly neurotic and pessimistic. As Woody Allen said: “Life is full of misery, loneliness, and suffering - and it’s all over much too soon.”

But then what is hope?

I define it as a belief in a better future. A belief that better days are possible. And where there is hope, we see action to bring about the change that is necessary for that better future. While in the absence of hope, we accept our condition and do nothing to change it.

The Jews have always been change-makers, which means we have fundamentally believed that a better world is possible. We have never been prepared to accept the world as is. We feel a compulsion - it is an inherent almost frenzied stirring - to seek to improve our lives and our world.

Indeed, that neurosis, that compulsion to examine and re-examine, comes from a belief that everything is important and everything can be made better.

Why is this so? Why are Jews inherently hopeful in spite of ample cause not to be? If we look at the events that dominate Jewish liturgy and tradition, there is a stream of hope that runs through each of them.

Take the Passover story, which Jews will commemorate next month. It is marked by dynamic, changing events, some positive, some tragic, but never is there an acceptance of fate or a submission to doom. The Jews initially seek refuge in Egypt hoping for a better future and an escape from famine in our own land. As is often the case, that hope was misplaced. We were enslaved and suffered great hardship and loss. But we were not prepared to accept our condition no matter how improbable our liberation would have seemed for it required a victory over the most powerful empire of the day.

Moses, though riddled with self-doubt, was driven by hope. Had he lacked the belief that we could be set free, would he have risked his life by putting demands to Pharaoh? But Moses believed in the justness of his cause and he had hope. He believed that liberation from slavery was possible. And so it was.

The Jewish people just marked the festival of Purim in which Haman, viceroy to the Persian ruler plotted the extermination of the Jews throughout the empire. The Jews did not accept their fate even when the situation seemed hopeless and irreversible. Instead they acted. They prepared themselves spiritually by fasting for three days. Meanwhile Mordechai, the arch-nemesis of Haman, used the position of his cousin, who happened to be the Queen, to influence the King. He convinces Queen Esther to risk her own life to intervene on behalf of the Jews and avoid the massacre. Only hope can drive such action. The loss of hope would have led us to accept our fate.

Indeed, when we look at the span of Jewish history, it is full of examples of the Jews facing implacable foes, improbable odds but still maintaining hope to compel them to act and seek change. The revolt against Greek imperial rule led by Judah Maccabee, the Great Revolt against the might of Rome: in the year 66 and a further rebellion against Roman rule led by Simon Bar Kokhba which ended in the year 135, follow the same basic chronology.

The Jews fall under the rule of great empires, they refuse to discard their beliefs and ideals no matter how intense the pressure, and they rise up and rebel when the oppression of these empires became too great. Hope was the driver in each case. The hope that empires will fall and the human desire to live freely will prevail. The hope that God will not abandon them.

It is this same spirit of hope that has seen Jews at the forefront of revolutionary movements throughout modern history. Some of these Jews explicitly invoked Jewish laws and principles; others repudiated them. But they were all driven by that Jewish virtue of hope, whether they realised it or not. Trotsky, Karl Marx, Rosa Luxembourg shaped the theories of communism and socialism out of a hope, rightly or wrongly, that society could be reorganized in a fairer, more just way. Jews were also at the forefront of the Civil Rights movement in America. We made up half of the young people who participated in the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964 and played a lead role in the march on Selma and the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), driven by a hope that justice and equality could overturn institutional racism. This is why Jonathan Sacks calls Judaism “the voice of hope in the conversation of mankind.”

For better or for worse, Jews are not prepared to be bystanders in this world or relinquish our agency. This is an inherently hopeful psychology. We hold to the belief that human life is sacred and fragile which compels us to strive to make a difference, to contribute and achieve, and leave this world in a healthier state than when we found it.

Equally, by withstanding empires and oppressors and preserving our traditions we have been able to transmit the values embedded into those traditions from generation to generation. In this way, the virtue of hope has been passed down for thousands of years. Consider how the five books of Moses end: Moses looks across the land that his people have not yet reached. It is a melancholy conclusion, but it is also remarkably hopeful as it leaves the story incomplete. Moses looks out at a destiny not yet fulfilled.

To the Jews, the Messianic Age lies ahead. This is the ultimate expression of the hope for better days and a fairer more just and peaceful world. We live in hope of the ingathering of the exiles, of the rebuilding of our Temple, of the end of wars, of the end of suffering. More so, and of great importance, we don’t believe that this Golden Age will come on its own; we believe that we, all of us, need to create the conditions for the fulfillment of Isaiah’s beautiful, poetic vision of a time when “nation will not take up sword against nation.”

In a classic expression of hope, when asked “Has the Messiah come?” a Jew should respond with a hopeful, “not yet.” Equally, in Jewish culture, when a young couple is asked if they have children - we Jews aren’t shy about saying into the affairs of others - the reply is invariably also “not yet,” indicating that better, more fruitful days lie ahead.

The national anthem of Israel, a state reborn just three years after the Holocaust and with an imperilled, precarious future ahead, is called HaTikvah - the Hope.

But I wouldn’t be presenting an account that is true to history if I didn’t make a final, balancing point. Hope is a beautiful, necessary condition that enables us to improve our lives and the world, and to endure when everything seems intolerably hard. In dark times, I have personally taken strength from the hopeful tones of King David: “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...”
thou art with me” (Psalm 23). But hope can also lead us astray. And it can take us to our destruction. And so it has been for the Jewish people, many times. There is hope and there is false hope.

I mentioned the heroic rebellions against imperial rule. These acts of hope and optimism have not always gone well. The rebellions against Rome were brutally crushed. By some accounts, over a million people were massacred, starved to death in sieges or taken away to die in Coliseums or live out their days in slavery. Our Temple was destroyed and we lost our homeland.

The hope for a better future has seen us put our faith in false claimants to be the Messiah. Mere men who have promised deliverance but have delivered nothing. And, perhaps it was the hope that better days will come, that things can’t be as bad as they seem, a hope in the ultimate goodness of man or the imminent, intervening hand of God that compelled many Jews to not take flight from Europe before they were consumed by the Holocaust.

Hope encourages us to see the world as it could be, but it can also prevent us from seeing the world as it is. Hope brings light but that light can blind. But I’ll circle back to end in a hopeful tone by quoting Rabbi Sacks once more:

“To be a Jew is to be an agent of hope in a world serially threatened by despair. Judaism is a sustained struggle against the world that is, in the name of the world that could be, should be, but is not yet.”

It seems that if one wants to show how evil Jews supposedly are, one invokes the charge of deicide— that the Jews killed Jesus. It is the easiest way thoroughly to condemn Jews, because the accusation is widely ingrained in Western religious tradition and culture and apparently requires no explanation. In Islamic tradition, Jews are ascribed with collective guilt as killers of the prophets, an only marginally less heinous charge. In both traditions the message is that Jews are innately evil and undeserving of being given a fair go, even today.

The theme of Jews as Christ-killers, as rejected, cursed, and their faith superseded, is also applied to Israel, as the nation-state of the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland. It is used in support of arguments that Israel has no right to exist, and seeks to justify the destruction of Israel as being ordained from above. This line of thinking says the Jewish people remain eternally rejected and cursed, and it emanates from some Christian and Muslim sources.

Antisemitism
Principal Themes in Contemporary Antisemitic Discourse
Julie Nathan
First published in Times of Israel

The perception and portrayal of Jews has varied over the millennia. Christian and Islamic sources have provided an abundance of negative stereotypes that have become so deeply ingrained into the culture of some societies that they are not even recognised as expressions of prejudice. In addition, views from the more secular modern period including the Enlightenment, pseudo-scientific theories on race and Nazi ideology, and responses to the modern Jewish state of Israel, have produced their own variants of age-old prejudices.

By studying the annual ECAJ Antisemitism Report for each of the four years from 2013 to 2016 (all of which I authored), a clear image appears of the contemporary major ideas and themes hostile to Jews which are expressed in Australian society and on online Australian-based sites. The popularity of these antisemitic themes are, however, not restricted to Australia. Each of these themes is discussed below.

1 JEWS AS CHRIST-KILLERS
The theme of Jews as “Christ-killers” includes not only the charge of deicide, but also the concomitant claims that Jews are a rejected and a cursed people, no longer chosen by God, and that Judaism has been superseded and is no longer relevant. The idea that as “Christ-killers” the Jews were both intrinsically evil and absolutely powerful, and not only willing, but also able, to kill the Christian deity, took hold and developed deep roots in the psyche of European Christians.
The blood libel theme is commonly used in reference to Israeli Jews, who are portrayed as collectively guilty of a range of bloody and vile crimes. They are generally accused of deliberately killing Palestinians, especially targeting children, taking delight in blood lust, and committing genocide against the Palestinian Arabs. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks succinctly noted, Israel “is regularly accused of the five crimes against human rights: racism, apartheid, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and attempted genocide. This is the blood libel of our time.”

3 “JEWISH LOBBY” AS INORDINATELY POWERFUL AND ILLEGITIMATE

The idea of a powerful and sinister “Jewish lobby” buying or unduly influencing or underhandedly manipulating decisions and events has featured in both the mainstream of society and on the fringes. It is irrelevant whether the term used is “Jewish lobby” or “Zionist lobby” or “Israel lobby.” Objectively, the reference is a generic one to the Jewish community and its major organisations, which overwhelmingly support Israel’s right to exist as the national home of the Jewish people. In effect, these terms seek to place the Jewish community and its major organisations outside the normal fabric of society. The effect is to delegitimise Jewish concerns, and to portray the Jewish community’s involvement in public discourse and mainstream society as illegitimate, suspicious, subversive and sinister. This suggests that Jews are different to other citizens, “the other”. In effect, these terms play to dog-whistle racist politics with subconscious messaging reflecting antisemitic conspiracy theories. The “Jewish lobby” idea does not reference any particular organisation or organisations or individuals per se, but conveys the belief that non-Jewish politicians, journalists, academics and others, only support the Jewish community and/or Israel solely or primarily because of pressure or money from shadowy, undefined “Jewish” sources. The corollary is the belief that without “Jewish” influence or “Jewish” money, people would not be supporting either the Jewish community or Israel.

The next step from believing in a powerful “Jewish lobby” which manipulates or threatens or buys influence is that of believing that “the Jews” control, or are in the process of controlling, the banks, media and politicians – three major areas of power within most countries. This theme originated in a coherent form with the publication in 1903 of The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, a document that was entirely fabricated by the Russian secret police to try to deflect anti-Czarist sentiment. The Protocols purported to set out a secret plot by leaders of “international Jewry” to take control of and rule the world. In short, it claimed that Jews aimed to influence, infiltrate and take control of governments, the media, and the banks; Jews were supposedly plotting to undermine and corrupt religion, morality, culture and society. The Protocols have been cited repeatedly by those advocating violence or even genocide against the Jewish people. At the heart of The Protocols is the conspiracy theory. Today, derogatory references to “the Jews” has generally been replaced by derogatory references to “the Zionists”. Yet the underlying object of the derogation is unchanged. Often a common identifier of this theme is a reference to “Rothschild”, the Jewish banking family, and more recently, to “Goldman Sachs”, an investment company established by two Jewish Americans in the nineteenth century. These brands are frequently referenced by antisemites as a code for “the Jews” or Jewish control.

The theme accuses Jews/Zionists/Israelis of being the same as, or worse than, the Nazis who murdered six million Jews. It most often occurs in reference to the Israeli-Arab conflict. The theme is one of Holocaust inversion, Holocaust minimisation, and often Holocaust denial. Comparing Israel to Nazi Germany, or Zionism to Nazism, or the Jewish Star of David to the Nazi swastika, as is common in anti-Israel discourse and protests, is recognised as antisemitic by virtue of it being a false analogy aimed at demonising Jews, and by minimising the evil of the deliberate and planned mass extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis, and sometimes, in turn retrospectively justifying the Holocaust against the Jewish people.

In effect, the comparison means: as Nazi Germany was destroyed, so too it is morally just to destroy Israel, if the Israelis and Zionists are so evil; then maybe Hitler had good grounds for committing genocide against the Jews; if Hitler had succeeded in wiping out the Jews, then there would be no Israel; and in retrospect, Hitler was doing the world a favour. These words impliedly justify acts of violence and murder against Jews in Israel and Jewish supporters of Israel.
**UNITED NATIONS**

Security Council resolution on Israel and Palestine will just make the standoff worse  

*Peter Wertheim and Alex Ryekin*

First published in the Sydney Morning Herald

In his last address to the United Nations Security Council on December 16, 2016, outgoing Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon recognised that the UN is biased against Israel.

“Decades of political manoeuvrings have created a disproportionate volume of resolutions, reports and conferences criticising Israel,” Ban said. “In many cases, rather than actually among the more resolvable parallel in international law. It is not applied to, nor is it claimed by, any other refugee group — only by the Palestinians. This is artificially hindering a resolution of the refugee issue.

Then there is the question of Palestinian dispossession and extremism. Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007, ruthlessly purged the rival Fatah organisation from the territory and stepped up rocket and mortar attacks against Israeli towns and cities, resulting in three wars.

The unwillingness or inability of the Palestinians to make peace was demonstrated by the collapse of the 2008 round of negotiations, during which Israel agreed to the creation of a Palestinian state. Israel proposed that it annex 6.3 per cent of the West Bank, within which all of the government-authorised settlement construction and expansion occurs and where 80 per cent of the settlers live. This would be compensated with 1:1 land swaps and an access way between the West Bank and Gaza to create a contiguous Palestinian state with a capital in east Jerusalem. The Palestinians rejected the offer without making a counter-offer.

The real difficulty in resolving the settlements issue is therefore not physical but political. In delivering its settlement-centric resolution, the Security Council has, in effect, ignored the issues that go to the heart of the conflict, preferring to fall into the bad habits that Ban Ki-Moon warned about. This will ultimately be counter-productive for all parties.

Resolution 2334 simply indulges the Palestinian refusal to negotiate or compromise. It will only serve to validate hardliners on both sides in the eyes of their own people, and thus cement Israelis and Palestinians into mutually irreconcilable positions.

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*THE ECAJ aknowledges and thanks ANTHONY AUSTRALIA PTY LTD for its generous support of our work*
New thinking on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process: towards a hybrid approach

Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM)

First published in Fathom

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Israeli-Palestinian arena is in deep disarray with little progress expected in the short term, and deep pessimism regarding the future. Israelis are plagued by political paralysis, Palestinians suffer from institutional weakness and neither side believes it has a partner for peace. Continuing regional chaos suggests the international community will remain focused elsewhere. With the EU beset by domestic challenges, and with a new US administration still finding its feet, no significant external intervention is anticipated in the short term.

- The dialogue analysed and critiqued four models for Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking: Bilateral negotiations focused on agreed parameters; a regional framework; constructive unilateralism; and Israeli-Palestinian confederation.

- In discussing these models, the participants agreed that any successful process will also require strong third party involvement as well as the creation of grassroots social movements that favour peace and mutual recognition.

- Such third party involvement should attend to the realities on the ground today rather than remaining trapped in a 1990s mind-set, which seeks one more effort to solve the conflict. Independent of any potential Western involvement – which may be limited – the role of regional actors matters hugely. While the Palestinians need regional diplomatic cover to make the two state deal, Israelis need regional involvement in resolving the core issues as well as regional buy-in and cooperation to take the tremendous security risks involved in territorial compromise.

- The failure of US Secretary of State John Kerry’s mediation effort between Israelis and Palestinians in 2013-2014 – following previous unsuccessful attempts to broker a negotiated, bilateral final status agreement – has further eroded the traditional paradigm of bilateral negotiations aimed at achieving a final status agreement. Yet the structural challenges and wide gaps in negotiations along with regional instability, international ambivalence and the absence of final status talks provide an opportunity, and an incentive, to re-evaluate the traditional model for Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. This paper, which is based on a series of confidential, track-II dialogues between current and former Israeli and Palestinian officials and academics and which took place under the auspices of BICOM and Chatham House, attempts to do just that.

- The Israeli-Palestinian arena is in deep disarray with little progress expected in the short term, and deep pessimism regarding the future. Israelis are plagued by political paralysis, Palestinians suffer from institutional weakness and neither side believes it has a partner for peace. Continuing regional chaos suggests the international community will remain focused elsewhere. With the EU beset by domestic challenges, and with a new US administration still finding its feet, no significant external intervention is anticipated in the short term.

- While there was little appetite for returning to the classic bilateral negotiation model without prior agreement on parameters, extensive analysis and critiques of each model did generate an interest in continuing to explore the potential of a “hybrid” model, creatively drawing upon components from each of the four different models discussed. Such a hybrid model would involve a regional framework for a peace process composed of a strategically creative deployment of genuinely constructive, and sometimes coordinated, unilateralism, and bilateral negotiations that move from framework agreements through incremental implementation to final status talks. The advantage of such a model lies in its combination of designing a political horizon or endpoint while harnessing the flexibility of constructive unilateralism, which might begin on a small scale. Moving away from sequential to parallel incentives, as the Arab League has recently done in the Arab Peace Initiative, and shedding the mantra of “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”, would also introduce more flexibility into the process. Finally, seemingly radical proposals found within the confederative model – such as allowing some Israeli settlers to remain in a Palestinian state with a similar number of Palestinian refugees residing in Israel – may also form part of this model, helping to resolve some intractable core issues.

- Unfortunately both sides in our final status talks. The advantage of such a model lies in its combination of designing a political horizon or endpoint while harnessing the flexibility of constructive unilateralism, which might begin on a small scale. Moving away from sequential to parallel incentives, as the Arab League has recently done in the Arab Peace Initiative, and shedding the mantra of ‘nothing is agreed until everything is agreed’, would also introduce more flexibility into the process. Finally, seemingly radical proposals found within the confederative model – such as allowing some Israeli settlers to remain in a Palestinian state with a similar number of Palestinian refugees residing in Israel – may also form part of this model, helping to resolve some intractable core issues.

BRITAIN ISRAEL COMMUNICATIONS & RESEARCH CENTRE (BICOM)

Don’t believe the hype: the settlers have not made the two-state solution unachievable

Orni Petruschka and Gilead Sher
First published in Fathom

OPTIONS
After 50 years of Israeli control over the West Bank, increasing numbers believe that a ‘two states for two peoples’ solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is impossible. These pessimists point to the total lack of trust between the two parties and the supposed irreversibility of the settlement enterprise, with some 590,000 people now living beyond the former 1949 armistice or Green Line. In this article, Blue White Future co-chairmen Gilead Sher and Orni Petruschka argue that while the obstacles are undoubtedly formidable, neither is insurmountable. The two-state solution is in political trouble but it is still achievable and imperative to the respective peoples’ solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is impossible. These pessimists point to the total lack of trust between the two parties and the supposed irreversibility of the settlement enterprise, with some 590,000 people now living beyond the former 1949 armistice or Green Line. In this article, Blue White Future co-chairmen Gilead Sher and Orni Petruschka argue that while the obstacles are undoubtedly formidable, neither is insurmountable. The two-state solution is in political trouble but it is still achievable and imperative to the respective parties.

LACK OF TRUST OR LACK OF CREATIVITY?
The lack of trust between Israelis and Palestinians originates primarily from repeated failures reaching signed agreements and subsequently implementing them, combined with varying levels of violent confrontations. The more the parties fail, the more they blame the other side, and trust declines still further. Each failure means the next round of talks begins from an even lower point. Between and during negotiations extremists and spoilers on both sides do their utmost to erode trust still further, sabotaging any progress, through terrorism, incitement and other actions.

The only way to exit this vicious cycle is to employ a different paradigm, one that is not based solely on bilateral negotiations towards a comprehensive agreement and thus does not require mutual trust as a necessary condition for progress.

The reason for changing the process is to lower the bar. Currently it is set too high: the achievement of a fully-fledged Permanent Status peace agreement. As in a high-jump competition, we need to set the bar at a lower level and only after it has been cleared, should we raise it progressively.

A more realistic target is a ‘divorce’ two-state agreement between the parties, focused on phased separation between the sides and an absence of violence. But even that level is currently still too ambitious, as was proven in the Camp David and Taba talks in 2000-2001 and in the Annapolis process in 2007-2008. Instead of moving towards an agreement to two states, we need to define our goal as moving towards a reality of two states, and to advance gradually towards that goal.

This approach consists of constructive steps that each side can take, independently of the other, in order to advance a situation – both on the ground and in the political realm – which is closer to two states. This paradigm calls for an increased role of the international community, which should provide a clear vision of the final end goal of an agreement – along the lines of the recent John Kerry six-point speech – and of the ways it will benefit both parties. In addition, the international community should also push the parties to make independent progress towards that destination. In other words, a continuous process that comprises transitional stages while moving steadily in the right direction should be initiated, facilitated, and supported. The respective independent steps should not be considered an exclusive route but rather a complementary – and eventually alternative – component within the context of regional and bilateral negotiations.

CONSTRUCTIVE INDEPENDENT STEPS
What would such constructive independent steps towards a reality of two states look like? On the Palestinian side it would involve building governmental institutions of the future Palestinian state; curtailing any incitement within their educational and political systems; working towards a fully functioning democracy which includes all factions that denounce violence; and applying for recognition as a fully-fledged member-state of the UN – a move which should be embraced by Israel and the international community.

On the Israeli side, one constructive independent step would be to announce that its goal as moving towards a reality of two states, and to advance gradually towards that goal.

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sovereignty over the areas located outside of the settlement blocs will necessitate enacting a law that enables voluntary relocation and includes considerable compensation for the settlers.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SETTLER COMMUNITY

Voluntary settler relocation brings us to the second obstacle to a two-state solution, which is the presence of the many settlers beyond the Green Line. The erroneous perception is that since it will not be possible to evacuate approximately 590,000 settlers, an agreement cannot be reached. But failing to make a differentiation between the main blocs and the more isolated settlements ignores both the exact areas in which the settlers reside and the trends within the settler community.

Let’s start with the actual numbers. The approximately 590,000 Jews living beyond the Green Line can be divided into three groups. The first group is the approximate 200,000 Israelis who live in the 12 Jewish neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, which will undoubtedly remain under Israeli sovereignty in any agreement. The second group is some 300,000 settlers who live in the so-called ‘settlement blocs’, located west of the security barrier which are usually very close to the Green Line. The vast majority of these settlements are also likely to remain under Israeli sovereignty. Only the third group, comprising 90,000 settlers – less than 20 per cent of the entire population of those living beyond the Green Line – who live beyond the route of the security barrier, needs to be addressed at the present time. These numbers are significantly fewer than the supposedly prohibitive numbers that are often quoted and regarded as an insurmountable obstacle.

Yet even this third group of 90,000 is far from being homogeneous. It includes far-right ideological settlers, secularists who moved from the kibbutzim in search for a better ‘quality of life’, and non-nationalist Ultra-Orthodox families who moved beyond the Green Line for cheaper housing. The group varies geographically, with most settlers on the mountain range – from central Samaria to the central part of the Judean mountains – being more ideological, whereas those in the Jordan valley, in northern Samaria and the southern Hebron mountains being less ideological. And it also varies in its approach to the two-state solution and the prospect of settlement evacuation, with some contemplating violent resistance while others actively seeking peaceful voluntary relocation.

HOW SETTLERS RELATE TO VOLUNTARY EVACUATION AND COMPENSATION

In a 2013-14 poll conducted by Blue White Future and the Macro Center for Political Economics, we found that within the Jewish population living beyond the security barrier (i.e. those of the third and supposedly problematic group.) 28.8 per cent of settlers would accept compensation and relocate to ‘Israel proper’, even before a permanent agreement is reached. This number is likely to grow once this option becomes a realistic alternative. Unsurprisingly, this figure is higher within the secular settlements of the Jordan valley and southern Hebron Mountains, where 43.1 per cent would accept compensation and relocate.

These findings underscore the need to enact a voluntary compensation and relocation law, which will enable those settlers who wish to relocate to do so, of their own accord. It will not only reduce the number of settlers in the West Bank and thus ease the burden of evacuation if and when the need arises in the context of an agreement, but it also represents a humane act that takes into consideration the difficulties suffered by these settlers. It would considerably reduce the personal, communal, societal and national trauma.

The erroneous perception is that since it will not be possible to evacuate approximately 590,000 settlers, an agreement cannot be reached.

Another interesting finding of the poll is that the older age groups are more supportive of a voluntary relocation and compensation law, with 46.5 per cent of people aged 50-59 supporting it. Many of these settlers moved to their homes in the 1970s and 1980s, when a totally different security, political, regional and diplomatic reality governed the territories. They now find themselves at a fairly advanced stage of their lives without their children – who often prefer not to stay in these settlements – and lack proper health services and other old age facilities. In a way, they are paying a price for the government’s indecision about the status of the territories and the resulting lack of investment in old age facilities.

It is the responsibility of Israeli society to recognise this reality and allow the settlers who so wish to rebuild their lives within boundaries, albeit provisional, that encompass the democratic nation-state of the Jewish people. It is the government’s responsibility to create the conditions that will allow them to relocate in a dignified and respectful manner that takes into consideration their current needs.

NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS FOR SETTLER ABSORPTION

Once a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian agreement is reached, it will inevitably require finding a solution not only to the roughly 30 per cent of settlers living beyond the security barrier who wish to relocate today, but to the rest of the approximately 90,000 settlers in that group as well. Although such an agreement may allow some settlers to remain within the borders of a Palestinian state, it should be assumed that most of the remaining settlers will prefer to relocate to Israel, albeit grudgingly.

An important aspect to consider sooner rather than later is a housing plan for these settlers within ‘Israel proper’ (including within those settlement blocs which will likely remain under Israel’s sovereignty as part and parcel of its territory).
Given the housing crisis in Israel, it is imperative that the government prepare a national plan for absorption of the settlers, so that the failures of housing arrangements after the 2005 Gaza disengagement will not be repeated. Like every other citizen, the settlers are concerned about house prices, employment, and essential social services.

A 2011 study conducted by Blue White Future on the availability of future housing for relocated settlers found that if the government accelerates a few infrastructure-related projects, the expected supply of housing can meet and even exceed the requirements. We therefore encourage the government to update that study and to implement its findings in order to open up an abundance of housing solutions.

PUBLIC LEGITIMACY

Finally, the hard-line, ideological settlers will accept an agreement and evacuate more peacefully if they believe that this is the genuine collective will of Israeli society. It is therefore important that any decision regarding settlement evacuation enjoys wide public legitimacy, and will not be based on a narrow majority in the Knesset.

It is preferable that the mechanism to approve the relocation of settlers following a comprehensive agreement should be based on a public referendum or on a clear majority of the Knesset. From the work Blue White Future has done within the settlements themselves, we have learned that wide public legitimacy will enable the ideological groups to make the case that the unity of the ‘people of Israel’ is no less important than the unity of the ‘Land of Israel,’ and that respecting the will of the people – as reflected by a clear majority – justifies compromising on their hard-line ideology.

It is both wrong and counterproductive to treat the settlers as obstacles to peace. Rather, Israeli society should regard them as pioneers or emissaries, whose mission has been accomplished, and who should thus be welcomed back and compensated accordingly. It is the duty of Israeli society and its leadership to ensure that the aspirations of the settlers are treated humanely and be met in a dignified manner.

SUMMARY

This year marks 100 years from the first international acceptance of Zionism in the form of the Balfour Declaration, 70 years since the UN partition resolution, and 50 years since the Six-Day War in which Israel – defending itself – conquered and subsequently occupied the West Bank. While the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems remote, careful analysis of the two major obstacles suggests that they can and should be overcome. Lack of trust can be circumvented by the adoption of a new paradigm – one that calls for constructive, independent steps towards a clear vision. The issue of settlements is perceived as a more formidable problem than it actually presents, and can be further reduced by careful and considerate treatment of the settlers.

Peace is possible. It requires political action and public engagement, internal dialogue within respective societies, building bridges from within, preparation of hearts and minds for a compromise and an indispensable paradigm shift. The despair regarding the chances to resolve the conflict is therefore unjustified, as smart, courageous yet careful leadership, as well as a candid internal dialogue, can achieve a breakthrough. As former Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern said: ‘We can always go back to killing each other’ It is time for a balanced and graduated political initiative that would be consistent with Israel’s long-term interests: ensuring the nation’s future as the secure, democratic nation-state of the Jewish people.

[1] According to a more conservative definition of the blocs which the Palestinians are more willing to accept in the context of territorial swaps to reach an agreement, the number of settlers residing in blocs is lower, numbering approximately 240,000. However for the interim steps and recommendations suggested in this article, which advance a two state reality, we have used an Israeli perspective on what constitute settlement blocs.

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Don’t believe the hype.
Under a new Polish law that took effect in September, Holocaust survivors and their heirs who unsuccessfully tried to reclaim their property in Warsaw decades ago under the Communist-era 1945 Warsaw Decree must come forward within six months after their property is listed in a Polish newspaper. If claimants do not come forward within that period, the City of Warsaw will permanently assume ownership of the property.

In response, the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) has created a unique database to reach those claimants. Lists of street names in the database conjure up images of a once thriving Jewish world, images tempered for the reader by the devastation that was soon to follow. Name after name of people who lived and worked in a busy city. A world that exists today in old photos and faded memories. And in this database.

The 1939/1940 Homeowners Directory for Warsaw, as its name suggests, was perhaps the final chapter of the documentation of an orderly structured society on the eve of destruction. Other directories from that period captured snapshots of the life of pre-War Warsaw — lists of properties, lawyers, dentists, phone directories, mortgage records, etc. Because of the outbreak of war, the 1939/1940 Homeowners Directory was never published. Years later it was found and painstakingly digitized by committed genealogists. It represents the seeming solidity of a city and a vibrant community. Thirty percent of Warsaw was Jewish. It was the city with the second largest Jewish community in the world, after New York City.

Many survivors returning to Poland after the Holocaust filed claims under the 1945 Warsaw Decree. However most of those claims were either rejected or not resolved, and many survivors and their families, 70 years later, many do not know that they can pursue their claims.

In June 2016, a list of 2,613 street addresses with open claims under the 1945 decree was made available by the City of Warsaw. They did not, however, publish the names of the claimants or owners of the properties — just the street addresses. WJRO matched that list against the Homeowners Directory and other historical material leading to the possible identification of two-thirds of the owners of properties that may have open claims.

The database is a creation of diligent research, manual data entry and modern technology combined with a stubborn refusal to let history disappear. The database will not reconstruct a devastated Jewish community. But it does offer a view into a forgotten world and it creates a dramatic new opportunity for the families of those who perished to reconnect with that lost past. And towards reclaiming that which was taken.

Scrolling down the names of streets listed in the database leads one to imagine wandering through Jewish Warsaw amidst the bustling streets. Not much remains of the pre-War buildings of Warsaw today — most were destroyed in the War. But the streets are largely the same and the plots are those on which previous generations built their lives.

Nalweki Street was at the heart of the Jewish district of Warsaw. Who was Zelko Goldberg, who according to the database, was the owner of 40 Nalweki Street — right by the synagogue at Number 41? What was his profession, who was in his family and did he or any of his family survive the Holocaust?

For some, this may be an opportunity to recover what is today valuable property and for others it will serve to renew the public effort to secure from Poland a full and complete return of property confiscated by the Nazis and the Communists — both in Warsaw and throughout Poland.

And it is a powerful reminder that the Jews who lived in Nalweki Street had real lives and families, homes and businesses. And that the struggle for historical justice is not finished.

The new WJRO Warsaw database can be found at www.wjro.org.il.
ECAJ IMPACT

A sample of our leadership and advocacy - at home and abroad.

ECAJ President Anton Block chairing a session at the World Jewish Congress plenary in New York.

ECAJ President Anton Block with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Prime Minister Turnbull and Lucy Turnbull.

ECAJ Immediate Past President Robert Goot speaking about the Australian Jewish community at a panel in the New South Wales Parliament.

The Australian delegation to the World Jewish Congress Plenary in New York with WJC president Ambassador Ronald Lauder (L-R) Alex Ryvchin, Anton Block, Jennifer Huppert (ECAJ VP), Robert Goot, Ambassador Lauder, Norman Scheuler (ECAJ VP).

ECAJ Director of Public Affairs Alex Ryvchin with Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova.

ECAJ Executive Director Peter Wertheim with former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

ECAJ Director of Public Affairs Alex Ryvchin with Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova.

ECAJ Director of Public Affairs Alex Ryvchin on Newsmax in New York discussing breaking news in Israel and the Middle-East.

ECAJ President Anton Block speaking about the Australian Jewish community at a panel in the New South Wales Parliament.

ECAJ Executive Director Peter Wertheim speaking about the Australian Jewish community at a panel in the New South Wales Parliament.

ECAJ Director of Public Affairs Alex Ryvchin training the World Jewish Congress Jewish Diplomatic Corps on speech-making.

ECAJ Director of Public Affairs Alex Ryvchin on SBS World News discussing the Arab-Israeli conflict.

ECAJ President Anton Block was among Jewish leaders who addressed the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

ECAJ Executive Director Peter Wertheim with Senator James Paterson and Julian Leeser MP after addressing the Parliamentary Inquiry on freedom of speech.

ECAJ Executive Director Peter Wertheim during a fiery debate with the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network on the ABC.

ECAJ Director of Public Affairs Alex Ryvchin with Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova.
The ECAJ is delighted to announce that it will be hosting Professor Alan Johnson, expert on the Arab-Israeli conflict and leftist antisemitism,

for an exclusive speaking tour of Australia in June-July 2017