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ב"ה שבת שלום
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שנה טובה ומתוקה וּמֵתוּקָה Shana Tova Umetuka

Post Election Issue

Bizarro World: Neither Candidate Wants the President's Blessing

Mati Tuchfeld

Before any general election, each candidate hopes the president will task him or her with forming the next government. Now, however, for the first time ever, the candidates hope President Reuven Rivlin will task their rival with the responsibility.

It seems the president has never had as much discretion as he does presently. Even in 1984 when the election resulted in a deadlock, Shimon Peres was tasked with forming the government because he received three more seats than his rival.

As stated, however, neither Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nor Blue and White leader Benny Gantz want to be granted the opportunity first, because alongside the inherent advantages of such a mandate, going first would actually reduce their chances of successfully forming a coalition.

On the other hand, both Netanyahu and Gantz aren't sure they want to go second either. Being tasked first comes with considerable advantages. For instance, when the Knesset is sworn in, power is transferred to the party that received the president's mandate. It controls the Arrangements Committee, it can create other committees, pass laws, and even try appointing a permanent Speaker of the Knesset – who wouldn't be replaced even if the other party eventually forms the government.

Gantz considered all these benefits when he decided to enter talks with the Arab parties, most of which recommended his Blue and White party and increased his odds of receiving the president's mandate. Again, though, in complete contrast to the aforementioned benefits, going first also entails the most critical of pitfalls – it reduces his chances of actually forming a government.

As of now, each side and all the parties are doubling down on their campaign promises. Netanyahu corralled a solid right-wing bloc that gives him the keys to forming a government at all, while Blue and White is refusing to enter coalition talks. It's safe to assume that as time passes, the glue holding these promises together will start to weaken.

This won't happen right away, but coalition talks last a minimum of 28 days, with an option for a 14-day extension thereafter. Another election, which would be Israel's third in the past year, is an extreme and outrageous scenario. We can reasonably expect all sides to do their utmost to gradually and eventually eschew most if not some of their campaign vows to avoid dispersing another Knesset. However, the fact that the first candidate's failure to form a government simply means the second in line receives the opportunity, could lead the parties to harden their stances in the near future and prevent progress.

Hence, only after the second candidate's attempt to form a government – in other words in another two-three months from today – will the pressure reach a breaking point conducive to compromise. Or perhaps other solutions will arise, such as party defections capable of tipping the scales.

For the time being, once the president is done receiving all the parties' recommendations, the decision is entirely his. It stands to reason that Rivlin, who is motivated by a healthy appetite for revenge toward the prime minister, will consider the option most likely to hurt Netanyahu, whether that means tasking him first or second, and will choose accordingly. The reasons for any decision he eventually makes, after all, are already known.

Israel's Flailing Democracy

Caroline B. Glick

US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's announcement Tuesday that she is opening an official impeachment inquiry against President Donald Trump struck many Israelis as yet another sign that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Trump are in the same boat. Both are hounded by legal elites who will stop at nothing to oust them from office.

There are parallels between the two leaders.

Pelosi's move followed the leak of a whistleblower complaint to the US intelligence community's inspector general. The complainant alleged that during a telephone conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in July, Trump sought the Ukrainian leader's assistance in advancing his 2020 reelection prospects. This is arguable.

During the course of the phone call, Trump asked Zelensky to speak with US Attorney General William Barr about the private cybersecurity company CrowdStrike. CrowdStrike is the private contractor that was hired by the Democratic National Committee in the spring of 2016 to investigate the alleged hack of the DNC's computer server.

CrowdStrike concluded that the DNC's server was hacked by entities related to the Russian government. The DNC never permitted federal investigators to take possession of the breached server, or receive CrowdStrike's full report. Despite the fact that they were never given the opportunity to verify CrowdStrike's claims, those claims were the basis of the US intelligence community's assertion in December 2016 that the Russian government hacked the DNC server to interfere in the 2016 election. It was also a foundation of the claim that the Trump campaign colluded with Russia against the Hillary Clinton campaign in 2016.

In his conversation with Zelensky, Trump said, "Our country has been through a lot and Ukraine knows a lot about it. I would like you to find out what happened with this whole situation with Ukraine, they say CrowdStrike...the [DNC] server, they say Ukraine has it...I would like to have the Attorney General call you or your people and I would like you to get to the bottom of it."

Trump also talked with Zelensky about Democratic presidential aspirant, former vice president Joe Biden.

During his tenure in office, Biden was responsible for US ties with Ukraine. As investigative journalist Peter Schweitzer reported, in April 2014, Biden's son Hunter was appointed to the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company. Over the next 16 months, Burisma paid Hunter Biden \$3.1 million. Biden joined the company while Burisma was under criminal probe by British and Ukrainian investigators.

In a post-vice presidency appearance before the Council on Foreign Relations, Biden bragged that he had conditioned the provision of \$1 billion in US loan guarantees to the Ukrainian government – loan guarantees that had already been approved by Obama – on the firing of the Ukrainian prosecutor carrying out the investigation against Burisma. Given the stakes, the Ukrainian government bowed to his demand. The prosecutor was fired and the loan guarantees were extended.

Speaking of Biden's admitted intervention with the Ukrainian prosecution, Trump said, "There's a lot of talk about Biden's son, that Biden stopped the prosecution and a lot of people want to find out about that so whatever you can do with the Attorney General would be great. Biden went around bragging that he stopped the prosecution so if you can look into it...It sounds horrible to me."

Democrats claim that Trump's discussion with constitutes an illegal solicitation of foreign assistance for his 2020 campaign for reelection. Republicans counter that Trump was reasonably trying to understand what happened to the DNC server in 2016. The story has served as a basis for claims that his presidency is illegitimate, and continuous investigations of his campaign.

Leaving aside the weight of the opposing claims, the fact is that there is nothing unique about Trump's actions. As Mark Thiessen noted in the Washington Post, in 2018, three Democratic senators urged the Ukrainian government to continue investigations into Trump's alleged collusion with Russia during the 2016 presidential campaign.

National Review noted that during the 2016 campaign, the Obama administration asked the Ukrainian government to open a criminal probe against Trump's campaign chairman Paul Manafort. So too, revelations regarding the origins of the Trump-Russia probe which fomented the nearly two-year Special Counsel investigation showed that the Obama Justice Department based wiretap requests against Trump campaign officials on a dossier paid for by the Clinton campaign and the DNC, and compiled by a former British spy on the basis of contacts with Russian operatives.

Democrats braying for impeachment have never shown the slightest interest in investigating the Obama administration's actions. No Democratic lawmakers has called to impeach Obama or members of his administration.

The criminal probes against Netanyahu relate to actions he took to secure positive media coverage that are similar, if not identical to routine political behavior. The two major probes against Netanyahu – dubbed Case 2000 and Case 4000 allege that Netanyahu acted criminally when he met with media owners in bids to secure more positive coverage.

In Case 2000, Netanyahu is accused of having breached the public faith when he met with Yediot Ahronot publisher Arnon Moses in an effort to secure positive media coverage. Yediot Ahronot's coverage of Netanyahu has been unstintingly negative. In Case 4000, prosecutors allege Netanyahu accepted a bribe in the form of positive media coverage on Walla news portal from Walla owner Shaul Alovich. Like Yediot, Walla coverage of Netanyahu has almost uniformly hostile.

Leading jurists from Prof. Alan Dershowitz of Harvard University to Prof. Avi Bell from Bar Ilan University agree that the legal proceedings against Netanyahu are political and based on prejudicial and selective enforcement of statutes which prosecutors are interpreting inventively.

As is the case with the allegations related to Trump's dealings with Zelensky, the first problem with the probes against Netanyahu is that his actions were far from unique – although less successful than similar actions by other politicians.

In just one striking example of the inherent bias of the charges against Netanyahu consider the behavior of the prosecutors in relation to Blue and White party co-chairman, and Yesh Atid party leader Yair Lapid.

While serving as finance minister in 2013 and 2014, Lapid held regular meetings Mozes. Government ministries controlled by Lapid's party colleagues provided millions of shekels in government advertising to Yediot Ahronot. And Lapid and his Yesh Atid party received unstintingly positive coverage in Yediot Ahronot.

Lapid has never been investigated for his actions.

Today, post-election wranglings in Israel over governing coalitions are guided by varied assessments of the likelihood that Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit will indict Netanyahu. During

the campaign leading up to the April elections, Mandelblit cast legal norms distinguishing politics from law to the seven winds. He took the unprecedented step of announcing that pending the outcome of Netanyahu's pre-indictment hearing, which is scheduled for next week, he intends to indict the premier on bribery and breach of trust charges over his dealings with Mozes and Alovich.

Now, as Netanyahu prepares for his pre-indictment hearing, the prosecution has leaked its intent to indict Netanyahu by mid-November. In other words, they have no intention to consider Netanyahu's defense claims. The outcome is preordained.

For many Israelis, Pelosi's decision to begin an impeachment investigation parallels moves by Mandelblit and State Prosecutor Shai Nitzan to fast track the probes against Netanyahu. But the opposite is the case.

Pelosi's impeachment bid is a sign that America's legal system and indeed its democracy is far healthier than Israel's.

For nearly two years, Special Counsel Robert Mueller and his partisan investigators spent millions of dollars on a massive, and barely veiled bid to find a legal excuse to oust Trump from office. But in the end, they failed. The evidence of collusion between Trump and his campaign and Russia, simply wasn't to be found.

Mueller could have kept going. The media wanted him to. The Democrats wanted him to. But after feeding the media prejudicial leaks against Trump and aggressively prosecuting Manafort and other Trump officials on unrelated issues, Mueller ran out of steam. Although in his final report Mueller tried to provide Democrats with the means to continue the Russia probe on the political level, he closed down his investigation and went home. US practice doesn't permit the indictment of a sitting president. But even if it allowed for indictments, the materials he had assembled were too weak to justify an indictment.

In other words, Mueller walked his prosecutors to the brink of political interference, and then he walked them back. He did not replace politicians with prosecutors.

Until Mueller submitted his report, Pelosi used his ongoing probe to fend off pressure from the increasingly powerful radical members of her Democratic caucus to initiate impeachment proceedings against Trump. Since then, Pelosi argued, rightly, that impeachment proceedings require a huge political investment and hold little chance for success. Most Americans oppose impeaching Trump. The Republicans control the Senate. If the House votes to impeach Trump, chances of getting the two-thirds majority of Senators required to convict an impeached president and remove him from office are effectively non-existent.

Unfortunately for Pelosi – the Democratic base, including the media and the empowered radical faction of her Democratic caucus – have become deaf to reason. According to a Politico poll, whereas 70 percent of Democrats support impeachment, only 37 percent of the public does. The likes of Anastasia Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, like the New York Times and the Washington Post live in an echo chamber. Members of the echo chamber are so cut off from those outside it that just as they cannot fathom anyone objecting to socialism, so they cannot imagine that anyone supports Trump or accepts the validity of the 2016 election results.

It is hard to know how the impeachment proceedings will play out. But a likely scenario is that the proceedings will damage Democrats more than they will damage Trump.

This then brings us back to Israel.

Like Pelosi and her colleagues, Blue and White leaders Benny Gantz and Lapid and their colleagues on the Left claim that the very fact that Netanyahu is under investigation renders him illegitimate. They refuse to form a unity government with Likud unless Netanyahu is first ousted as Likud leader.

But unlike Pelosi, Gantz and Lapid don't need to make their claims themselves. Lapid, whose ministers gave preferential treatment to Yediot through government advertising contracts and received glowing coverage in the paper, does not have to argue the case for impeaching Netanyahu. He stands behind the ostensibly "objective" state prosecutions.

Pelosi's decision to open impeachment proceedings against Trump despite the great political risk involved going into an election year indicates that the radical faction of the Democratic party has swallowed the party. But more importantly, her move is a testament to the abiding power and fortitude of American democracy. The difference between the situation in Israel, where the prosecutors happily abuse their legal power for transparently political aims and the US, where politically motivated prosecutors backed away from the brink and compelled politicians to take over their political investigations, is the difference between a flailing democracy and a resilient democracy.

BDS (Bibi Derangement Syndrome) & the Myth of Israel Theocracy

Martin Sherman

...for most Israelis the election results are signaling hope!... hope that we were saved from Halachic state and messianic tendencies govern[ed] by a prime minister that undermined the fabric of the collectivity!"

-Prof. Yossi Shain,

Georgetown & Tel Aviv University, in a Facebook exchange with me over the significance of the recent election results.

Israeli democracy this week was only a few inches from being Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey

- Ehud Barak, Haaretz, Sept. 21, 2019.

Let me commence with full disclosure on two matters: First, I am a totally non-observant Jew, with little to no religious content at all in my day-to-day life—and have little vested interest in defending the religious against criticism from secular circles. Second, I am far from an uncritical Netanyahu apologist, and have severely castigated some of his decisions in several columns in the past—see here, here, here & here.

Beyond limits of rational criticism & reasoned dissent

Accordingly, although I have voted for him in recent elections, this was due far more to my concern regarding his major rivals than any unswerving affinity for him personally or for his policies, regarding which I have more than a few reservations. Thus, it would probably accurate to say that I voted against his adversaries, rather for Netanyahu himself.

Perhaps another issue that nudged me into casting my ballot for Bibi was my deep distaste for the vicious and vitriolic exhortation of the man and his deeds—no matter what he did...or did not do. Indeed, I have long been appalled and astonished by the toxic tirades to which his detractors have subjected him.

Of course, after decade of unbroken tenure—and almost a decade and a half overall—as prime minister, a legitimate claim can well be raised that a change is called for. But in Netanyahu's case, opposition to him goes well beyond legitimate concern over the need for an overdue "changing of the guard".

Thus, over half a decade ago, well before claims of an excessively long incumbency could be plausibly raised, I wrote, of the anti-Netanyahu pathology: "The venomous ad hominem attacks on the PM by his political opponents have long exceeded the limits of rational criticism and reasoned dissent."

Indeed, listening to the rabid rants of the myriad of "Bibiphobes", an uninformed observer from another planet would be led to believe that Netanyahu is to blame for every misfortune and every malfeasance on the face of the globe - from a typhoid epidemic in East Asia to the cocaine industry in Latin America.

Absurd portrayal: The myth of Israel theocracy

Moreover, to judge by the derogatory diatribes directed at him, one might get the impression that he has made Israel a dark, backward, regressive backwater, tittering on the brink of tyranny and theocracy, combining the brutality of the Congo, the repression of Sudan and the religious intolerance of Saudi Arabia.

But for anyone familiar with reality in Israel, this is an absurd portrayal of the country.

Indeed, those who have experienced Israel know it to be a vibrant, albeit raucous, democracy, with a free—if often biased—press, a legislature elected by what are, overall, free and fair elections, a vocal, unfettered parliamentary opposition and an independent judiciary. It has become a technological

power house, a global leader in innovation, with internationally acclaimed achievement in art and culture and on the cutting edge in most fields of human endeavor—in computer science and IT, in medicine, in water conservation, and in agriculture to name but a few.

As for the claims of creeping theocracy: The highways have never been more congested on Saturdays, with huge traffic jams backed up for miles; shopping malls have never been more crowded with customers on the Sabbath; beaches have never been more crowded over the weekends, and the bikinis never more skimpy; non-kosher restaurants, serving every variety of seafood, have never been more packed, week-end leisure activities—from mountain biking to windsurfing—never been more popular.

With massive "gay pride parades" in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem a regular annual feature of public life, with Tel Aviv dubbed by some as the "gay capital of the world", Israel is hardly a state in the iron grip of religious zealots!

Anyone attempting to cast it in this light is clearly either woefully misinformed or willfully misleading.

Malevolent & mendacious

Recently, in an attempt to delegitimize him, Netanyahu's political rivals have begun to compare him to Turkey's authoritarian leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—see for example here and here.

The charge is, of course, baseless.

After all, Erdoğan has conducted wide-spread purges of the judiciary and other sectors of the legal establishment – see here, here and here.

According to the Law Society, there has been "widespread and systematic persecution of members of the legal profession in Turkey" with countless suspects being convicted of terrorism "without credible evidence".

Quoting an international coalition of lawyers, the Guardian reported that: "Trust in Turkey's justice system is being undermined by the systematic dismissal and jailing of thousands of judges and prosecutors. Judges' and prosecutors' independence has been systematically undermined in Turkey".

Moreover, Erdoğan's Turkey has won the dubious title for jailing more journalists than any other country –reportedly "more than China, Russia and Egypt combined"—see here and here. Indeed, since Erdoğan became president in 2014, prosecutors have opened more than 1,800 cases against people for insulting him and a Dutch journalist of Turkish parentage was arrested while vacationing in the country for criticizing the Turkish president.

Clearly then, any comparison between the realities in Israel and those in Turkey are wildly distortive, hopelessly detached from reality and beyond reasonable doubt, deliberately deceptive.

Under Netanyahu, nary a judge nor a prosecutor has ever been charged with—much less convicted of—terrorism. Likewise, no journalist, however critical of him or his government, has ever been investigated—much less—arrested for opinions he/she expressed in the media.

Accordingly, any suggestion of similarities between the two is manifestly malevolent and mendacious.

Acrid ad hominem acrimony

In many ways, the acrid ad hominem acrimony against Netanyahu is puzzling.

After all, despite the specter of criminal indictments, he invariably tops the polls as the candidate most suited to be Prime Minister—usually outpacing his nearest rival, Blue & White's Benny Gantz, by ten percentage points or more – see for example here, here & here.

Surprisingly—indeed, astonishingly—even among Israeli Arabs, Netanyahu was designated the "best suited for the role of premier" (23.6%)—scoring well over double the approval rate of Ayman Odeh (9.9%), head of the Arab Joint List, who was just ahead of Gantz (9.6%).

This resounding public endorsement is not undeserved. After all, despite some undeniable shortcomings, during his tenure he has accumulated an impressive record of achievement—in virtually every field of national endeavor—economic, diplomatic and security.

Under Netanyahu-led coalitions, Israel's economy surged, with GDP per capita climbing by over 50%, equaling or surpassing that of France, UK and

Japan—a feat unimaginable not many years ago. Moreover, by encouraging Israel's pivot to the East, he considerably reduced economic dependence of an often less-than-friendly EU.

On the international front, he managed to wait out the largely antagonistic Obama incumbency, seemingly without major damage; established extremely amiable relations with the current US administration, with Russia, India and the once hostile Brazil.

Ad hominem acrimony (cont.)?

His resolve on Iran's nuclear program helped induce the US withdrawal from the atrocious accord struck with Tehran and the re-imposition of punishing sanctions against it. In Eastern and Central Europe, he managed to forge a counter weight against an otherwise disapproving EU and made significant diplomatic inroads into Africa and South America.

With regard to security, under his premiership, the IDF have conducted highly successful operations in the north against the Hezbollah tunnel system and the Iranian build up in Syria. As to his handling of terror, apart from periodic flare-ups and excessive restraint against Hamas, he has brought attacks down to almost imperceptible levels for the majority of Israelis—and certainly far less than was the case in the gory times of his predecessors—when attacks were a regular feature of daily life here—in cafes, on buses, in shopping malls, and on crowded sidewalks.

Thus, as I observed previously, after such an extended term in office as had by Netanyahu, a valid case for change can be raised. However, since—by and large—under his leadership, Israel has prospered significantly economically, enjoyed relative security, and enhanced its international standing, the intensity and fervor of the “Bibi derangement syndrome” seems perturbingly inappropriate.

The detriments of BDS (Bibi Derangement Syndrome)

I have purposely avoided broaching the subject of the pending indictments against Netanyahu—as this is something I have dealt with elsewhere—and about which, I am convinced, that anyone, who is not an obsessive Bibiphobe, would tend to agree that “[t]he unrelenting drive to bring an indictment—any indictment—against Netanyahu has long exceeded the bounds of reasonable law enforcement”.

Instead, I have focused on the issue of Netanyahu's record of governance, rather than on his alleged personal misdeeds.

It is here that his political opponents should exercise greater caution and restraint.

For in their unbridled assaults on Netanyahu and on what Israel has allegedly become under his leadership, they are playing right into the hands of the country's most vehement detractors. Indeed, it is difficult not to imagine them rubbing their hands in malicious glee, gloating over every caustic condemnation of Netanyahu by his domestic rivals.

After all, what more need they do to prove their case that Israel has become a fascist, racist state, run by xenophobic religious zealots, nudging it ever closer to totalitarian theocracy, than to quote the largely baseless barbs, hurled at him by those struggling to dislodge him from power?

Indeed, by their own hand, they are laying the foundation for incalculable—and potentially irreversible—damage to Israel, damage which, even if they manage to remove and replace Netanyahu, they themselves will not be able to repair.

Martin Sherman is the executive director of the Israel Institute for Strategic Studies.

Gaza – Poor & Most Densely Populated

Bassam Tawil

In recent years, reports have surfaced regarding the wealth and luxurious lives of Hamas leaders, such as Ismail Haniyeh, whose capital is estimated at \$4 million. It is time for the international community to wake up to the fact that it is wealthy Hamas leaders, and not Israel, who are responsible for the humanitarian and economic disaster that is known as the Gaza Strip. (Image source: Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

The leaders of Hamas, the Palestinian terror group ruling the Gaza Strip since 2007, seem to have hearts of stone regarding the suffering of the people living under their regime.

These leaders have no problem sending Palestinians to risk their lives near the border with Israel, while

they and their families enjoy a comfortable life. More than 250 Palestinians have been killed and thousands injured in clashes with the Israel Defense Forces since the beginning of the Hamas-sponsored weekly protests near the Gaza-Israel border in March 2018.

While the protests are continuing and more Palestinians continue to put their lives at risk at the behest of the Hamas leadership, the terror group's senior officials are busy throwing lavish parties for their family members and upgrading their personal treasuries. It is as if the Hamas leaders were telling their people: Sacrifice yourself for the cause of destroying Israel and killing Jews so that we and our families can continue to live it up.

The latest example of this exploitation of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip surfaced in the form of a video of the birthday celebration of 20-year-old Mohammed, son of senior Hamas official Ghazi Hamad.

Hamad, a former deputy foreign minister in the Hamas government of 2012, currently serves as deputy minister in the Hamas-controlled Ministry for Social Welfare and is personally entrusted with overseeing aid to the most impoverished families in the Gaza Strip. Ironically, the man in charge of caring for the poorest families was caught on camera throwing a lavish birthday party for his son.

The video of the birthday party in the Gaza Strip has gone viral on social media. Many Palestinians expressed outrage over the celebration which, they said, took place at a time when the residents of the Hamas-ruled coastal enclave are facing dire economic conditions and are being killed in clashes with the Israeli security forces as they try to infiltrate the border with Israel and throw rocks, petrol bombs and explosive devices at Israeli soldiers.

"The sons of our leaders are always different from the ordinary people," commented Facebook user Ahmad Hassan.

Another Palestinian, Bashar Bashar, wrote: "This party is at the expense of the victims of the weekly demonstrations [near the border with Israel]."

Hussein Qatoush, yet another Facebook user, wrote: "Frustrated Palestinian youths are committing suicide because of poverty, while the sons of the leaders are holding birthday parties!"

Many other social media users said they were not surprised to see a Hamas leader throwing a big party for his son at a time when young Palestinians are fleeing the Gaza Strip because of soaring unemployment and economic hardship there.

The good news is that a growing number of Palestinians seem to be aware of the corruption of their Hamas leaders and the wide gap between the leadership and the people. The bad news is that Palestinians are still afraid to revolt against the Hamas rulers who have been holding them hostage in the Gaza Strip since the terror group's violent takeover of the area 12 years ago.

Alarmed by the widespread criticism, the Hamas leader rushed to issue an "apology," claiming that his son's friends were the ones who held the birthday party and not him.

"I'm not satisfied with this party and I don't accept it," Hamad said.

"I apologize to everyone for this grave mistake. I live a simple life, like the rest of our people. I fully understand the suffering and harsh conditions of our people, and repeat my apology. I promise that this will never happen again."

The Hamas leader, who also promised to "punish" his son, would never have apologized had the video of his son's birthday bash not been leaked on social media. His apology hardly passes as sincere.

In truth, Hamad and the rest of the Hamas leaders owe an apology to the families of the Palestinians they send to attack Israeli soldiers near the border with Israel.

They owe an apology to the thousands of Palestinians killed in wars with Israel because of the rockets Hamas and other terror groups have been firing at Israeli civilians for the past 12 years.

They owe an apology to the tens of thousands of unemployed Palestinians, some of whom are being forced to flee the Gaza Strip in search of a decent life abroad.

They owe an apology to the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian families living in squalor and misery as a result of Hamas's disastrous policies and actions.

Hamad is very, very far from alone in his appropriation of money intended for indigent Palestinians.

In an attempt to calm down Palestinians concerning this issue, Hamas announced on September 23 that it decided to impose a fine of 5,000 Jordan Dinars (about \$7,000) on the son of another Hamas leader.

Anas, the son of senior Hamas official Ismail Radwan, was accused of taking advantage of a Saudi grant to families of Palestinians killed in clashes with Israel to travel to Mecca for the Islamic pilgrimage (hajj). Although the Saudi grant was dedicated only for those families, the son of the Hamas leader was able to add his name to the list of beneficiaries.

Many Palestinians took to social media to express their outrage over the trip to Mecca, seriously embarrassing the Hamas leadership for nepotism and corruption.

After the uproar, Hamas formed a commission of inquiry; it concluded that the son of the Hamas leader had acted in "violation of the norms and procedures" concerning the Saudi grant.

Let us return to Hamad, who claims that he lives a "simple life": this is a laughable lie.

In recent years, various reports have surfaced regarding the wealth and luxurious lives of Hamas leaders.

One report suggested that Musa Abu Marzouk, the No. 2 in Hamas, "is considered one of Hamas's wealthiest billionaires, with a wealth estimated at \$2-3 billion."

Another report said that the former leader of Hamas, Khaled Masha'al, is worth \$2.6 billion. The next Hamas tycoon is Ismail Haniyeh, whose capital is estimated at \$4 million, according to Dr. Moshe Elad, a lecturer in the Middle East Department of the Western Galilee Academic College.

Hamas's rivals in the ruling Fatah faction, headed by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, say that while Gaza is one of the poorest places in the world, there are 1,700 millionaires among Hamas members. Professor Ahmed Karima of Al-Azhar University, pointed out that Hamas has long become a movement of millionaires. According to Karima, Hamas can count no fewer than 1,200 millionaires among its members.

Generally speaking, it is heartwarming to see parents celebrating their children's birthdays. Palestinians, of course, are entitled to hold birthday parties and other celebrations. It is better to see Palestinians dancing and singing than stabbing Jews or firing rockets at Israeli cities.

The problem, however, is when your father is a senior terrorist leader who devotes himself to inciting against Israel and Jews and encouraging other young Palestinians to sacrifice their lives in the war against Israel. Hamad, like the rest of the Hamas leaders, would never send his own son to attack soldiers at the border with Israel. As far as these leaders are concerned, the blood of their children is apparently redder than the blood of other Palestinians.

It is time for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to revolt against the leaders who are keeping them chained in poverty and sending them to their deaths. The birthday party scandal could serve as a trigger for such a revolt. It is also time for the international community to wake up to the fact that it is wealthy Hamas leaders, and not Israel, who are responsible for the humanitarian and economic disaster that is known as the Gaza Strip.

Bassam Tawil is a Muslim Arab based on the Middle East. Gatestone Institute

USAID Has a Terror Finance Problem

Clifford Smith

The U.S. Treasury recently decided to level sanctions against the Lebanon-based Jammal Trust Bank for supporting Hezbollah's illicit financial and banking activities. This led almost immediately to the bank's collapse, showing just how much of an effect targeted sanctions can have.

This is a welcome development that may well deter others from working with terrorists or working with those who fund terrorists.

But unfortunately, one group seemingly in need of such a deterrence is part of our own government. The U.S. Agency for International Development, as late as last year, was still openly touting its work with Jammal Trust.

Indeed, in a series of Facebook posts in 2018, USAID Lebanon openly touted a \$250,000 grant in "partnership" with Jammal Trust for their "The Livelihoods and Inclusive Finance Expansion" project, which was aimed at expanding microfinance to Lebanese entrepreneurs. Jammal Trust reciprocated the celebration, advertising the same program on their Facebook page (since removed, but still visible here).

It is true that until last month, Jamaal Trust was not a sanctioned entity. However, the problems with the bank are not new. Treasury's press release announcing sanctions specifically mentions that the relationship between Hezbollah and Jamaal Trust went back to "at least the mid-2000s." Wikileaks documents show that American diplomatic officials have been raising these concerns with Jammal Trust officials since at least 2007. And earlier this year, a major lawsuit was filed on behalf of victims of Hezbollah's terrorism that named Jamaal Trust as a defendant.

In other words, this problem had been percolating well before USAID entered into its partnership with Jamaal Trust.

If this were the first time USAID had been funding groups closely linked to terrorism in regions dominated by terrorist organizations, it could be written off as a simple mistake. Unfortunately, it's a recurring issue.

In 2014, USAID, through the evangelical charity World Vision, subgranted a six figure sum to the Islamic Relief Agency, a Sudanese-based group that the United States had designated as terror financiers in 2004 for providing funds to Osama bin Laden and other terrorists. While this was largely the fault of World Vision, which failed to responsibly vet its subcontractors, USAID did little or nothing to catch the error. It is especially troubling to rely on World Vision's due diligence, as the organization has previously been involved with U.S.-designated terror groups Hamas, INTERPAL, and the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Worse still: This wasn't the first time ISRA had benefited from a USAID grant since being designated by the U.S. Misappropriated USAID money funded former Rep. Mark Siljander's illegal efforts to get ISRA delisted as a designated terror finance group.

Prior to that, USAID had funded the READ Foundation in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, one of the most dangerous flashpoints in the world. READ is openly affiliated with Jamaat-e-Islami, a radical theocratic group with a long, violent history. Some wings of Jamaat-e-Islami, such as Hizbul Mujahideen, are designated as terrorists by both the U.S. and the U.N., and openly claim responsibility for terrorism in Kashmir. Nonetheless, USAID saw fit to give the READ Foundation over \$2 million.

Muslim Aid, another group established by Jamaat-e-Islami activists, has also received USAID grants. Documents recently released pursuant to a Freedom of Information Act request show that Treasury's Office of Foreign Asset Control, in charge of stopping funds to terrorist groups, looked into Muslim Aid as a potential terror financier in 2015. The group had received more than \$1.5 million from USAID in 2013, three years after it admitted to funding Hamas organizations.

Finally, Islamic Relief Worldwide and its branches (not to be confused with ISRA, a separate organization) are designated as terror financiers by the United Arab Emirates and Israel. One of its founders, Essam El Haddad, was just sentenced to 10 years in jail by an Egyptian court because of his collaboration with Hamas while involved with both Islamic Relief and the short-lived Morsi regime.

Tunisia and Bangladesh have accused Islamic Relief of terror finance and attempts at radicalizing vulnerable refugees, respectively. All this caught the eye of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee last year, with witnesses and members denouncing Islamic Relief.

Nonetheless, USAID has partnered extensively with Islamic Relief, providing them with over \$1.5 million dollars since 2014 and even jointly sponsoring Iftar dinners.

While the specifics in each case differ, the pattern is somewhat alarming of USAID failing to delve deeply into the unsavory alliances and ideologies of groups that receive its funds. As the American Enterprise Institute's Jessica Darden, an expert on the nexus

between aid and terrorism, points out, even USAID's own inspector general, as a result of a partial audit, said USAID gave away \$700 million in awards without an adequate system to ensure funds don't benefit terrorists.

Much of the aid community seems resentful of existing restrictions, instead demanding lighter ones. They would like to see restrictions apply only when there is a clear "diversion" of funds to terrorism directly. But even if funds end up in the pockets of groups connected to terrorist groups' welfare and political arms, the problem remains. As Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan once said, "When you help Hezbollah build homes, you help Hezbollah build bombs."

USAID, through their partnership with Jammal Trust, did precisely this. Giving funds to extremists and their enablers both provides unearned legitimacy and frees up other funds for nefarious deeds.

The chief problem seems to lie with USAID's vetting policy. In the cases of Jamaal Trust, Islamic Relief, and Muslim Aid, USAID appeared unconcerned with handing out taxpayer's money to radicals because the only cause for prohibition would have been inclusion on the Treasury Department's list of designated terrorist entities. None of the groups was present on the list at that time. And in the case of ISRA, USAID relied on a problematic third party to check whether ISRA was on the list or not.

The Trump administration should follow up on its tough rhetoric toward radical Islamic networks by taking the practical step of broadening USAID's vetting approach. Mere exclusion from the designated terror list should not be enough. A higher standard should be required to actually receive government funds than simply not being barred from receiving them. Instead, USAID should check itself to see if recipients of U.S. government funds have any connection at all to an entity on the list. This stricter policy would have excluded all of the terror-linked charities named above from receiving U.S. government grants.

If USAID's policy does not change, expect more instances in which well-intentioned grant programs end up subsidizing unspeakable acts of terrorism instead of saving lives.

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In Other News...

Rosh Hashanah (New Year) Guide for the Perplexed, 2019

Ambassador (ret.) Yoram Ettinger

1. The conventional meaning of the two Hebrew words Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, is: the beginning (Rosh in Hebrew) of the year (Shanah in Hebrew). The evening of September 29, 2019 will launch the 5780th Jewish New Year.

2. An innovative meaning of the two Hebrew words, Rosh Hashanah, is provided by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, the iconic Talmud scholar, who highlights another meaning of the Hebrew word Rosh: head. Rabbi Steinsaltz compares the calendar year to a human body, featuring the head/brain (the epicenter of the thought process), the heart (the intersection of blood supply) and the liver (the crux of the digestion process). Thus, the head/brain (Rosh Hashanah) contemplates the vision, strategy, tactics and norms/values of the coming year. The other parts of the body (the rest of the year) facilitate the implementation of the plan. Proper coordination between the head/brain (מוח in Hebrew), heart (לב) and liver (כבד) produces the acronym מלך - the Hebrew word for royal/king, suggesting that one is in-charge and secure.

3. The root of the Hebrew word, Shanah (year), is both "repeat" and "change," which underlines the purpose of Rosh Hashana's prayers and soul-searching: repeat the practice while learning from experience, in order to enhance one's behavior.

4. The Hebrew letters of Rosh (ראש) constitute the root of the Hebrew word for Genesis, pronounced "Be're'sheet" (בראשית), which is the first/lead word in the Bible (Book of Genesis). Rosh Hashanah is celebrated on the first day of the Jewish month of Tishrei, which means beginning/Genesis in ancient Acadian. The Hebrew letters of Tishrei (תשרי) are

also included in the spelling of Genesis (בראשית). The Hebrew spelling of Genesis (בראשית) consists of the first two letters in the Hebrew alphabet (אב), the middle letter (ט) and the last three letters (רשת) – representing the complete/wholesome undertaking of the Creation.

5. Rosh (ראש) is the Hebrew acronym of "the will of our Heavenly Father" (רצון אבינו שבשמיים).

6. Rosh Hashanah is celebrated on the 6th day of Creation, when the first human-being (Adam) was created, highlighting the centrality of the soil – a metaphor for humility – in human life. Thus, the Hebrew word for a human-being is Adam (אדם), which is the root of the Hebrew word for "soil" (אדמה), while the Hebrew letter ה is an abbreviation of God, the Creator.

7. The Hebrew word Adam (אדם) contains the Hebrew word for blood (דם), the liquid of life, and is the acronym of Biblical Abraham (אברהם), David (דוד) and Moses (משה), the three role models of humility.

8. Rosh Hashanah is only one of four Jewish New Years:

The anniversary of the Creation (Rosh Hashanah), the beginning of the Jewish civil calendar and the seasons, the setting of the Sabbatical (7th) and Jubilee (50th) years, and the time for calculating the annual tithe (10%) on vegetable and grains.

The first day of the month of Nissan initiates the three Jewish pilgrimages/festivals (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles) and the measuring of the reign of ancient kings.

The first day of the month of Elul initiated the preparations for Rosh Hashanah and the New Year for animal tithes in ancient Israel.

The 15th day of the month of Shvat is the new year of trees (Arbor Day), which represent humility, tenacity and growth.

9. Rosh Hashanah is announced, and celebrated – in a humble and determined manner – by the blowing of the Shofar (the ritual ram's horn), which also announces the (50th) year of the Jubilee. The Hebrew word for Jubilee is Yovel, a synonym for Shofar. The Jubilee inspired the Founding Fathers' concept of liberty as documented on the Liberty Bell: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land and unto all the inhabitants thereof." It also inspired the US anti-slavery, Abolitionist, movement.

10. The Hebrew spelling of Shofar, שופר, is a derivative of the verb שפר, which means to enhance – an unending, uphill effort (sometimes, against all odds) for improvement.

11. The shofar is the epitome of peace-through-strength. It is made from the horn of a ram – a peaceful animal equipped with strong horns to fend off predators. The numerical value of the Hebrew word for "ram," איל, is 41 (א=1, ל=30, י=10, א=1), which is equal to the value of "mother" (אם, א=1, מ=40), who strongly shields her children. Rosh Hashanah prayers highlight optimism of motherhood demonstrated by the Biblical Sarah, Rachel and Chana, who gave birth to Isaac, Joseph, Benjamin and Samuel.

12. The blowing of the Shofar (100 blows during Rosh Hashanah services)...

Commemorates the creation of Adam, the first human-being; the almost-sacrifice of Isaac, which was avoided by God's angel and a ram; the receipt of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai; the tumbling of the walls of Jericho upon entering the Land of Israel; and Judge Gideon's war against the Midianites;

Highlights the month of Tishrei - "the month of the Strong Ones" (Kings A. 8:2) - when Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Samuel were born.

Reaffirms faith in God as the Creator (ancient kings were anointed to the sound of the Shofar) - an ancient expression of "In God we trust";

Alerts humanity to significant developments (e.g., deliverance and attacks);

Constitutes a moral wakeup-call, individually and collectively, initiating the Ten Days of Repentance, and soul-searching which conclude on Yom Kippur;

Highlights the ingathering (Aliyah) of Jews to the Land of Israel, emphasizing optimism in the face of adversity.

Wishing you a year top heavy on health, modesty, challenge and reward.