



NEWS REVIEW

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Australian Jewry responds to Victorian bushfire tragedy

The President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, today expressed the shock, sadness and distress of the Australian Jewish Community, at the tragic loss of life, loss of property and suffering that has been inflicted on so many by the ongoing bushfires in Victoria.

Together with other Australians, the Australian Jewish community has rapidly mobilised to provide both practical and spiritual help for the victims of the bushfires that have struck Victorians with such devastating effects.

Executive Council of Australian Jewry president Robert Goot stated today:

“It is impossible to comprehend the magnitude of the disaster that has struck Victorian families, so quickly and with such a brutal impact. Our thoughts are with all those who have suffered losses in this tragedy.

“The courage and fortitude shown by all fire fighters, emergency services workers and ordinary people alike is extraordinary and must be recognised.

“Yet this is not a time for reflection. Rather it is a time to provide practical and spiritual solace and this is what we are requesting of the Australian Jewish community.

There are numerous Jewish organisations in Victoria taking their own initiatives to ensure aid relief reaches those who need it and for that we commend them. However the ECAJ’s Victorian affiliate, the JCCV is largely working with Jewish Aid Australia and Magen David Adom.

Magen David Adom is assisting with material aid, including clothing, shoes, toys and linen. However I understand that what is most useful now is donations of money. The JCCV is collaborating with Jewish Aid Australia in this regard. The most effective way of providing such donations is online <http://www.jewishaid.org.au/donate-2.html>

The ECAJ urges all within the Jewish community to dig deep to support our fellow Australians and to join in prayer so that those suffering in this terrible disaster will soon find relief, and that the courageous fire-fighters, emergency service workers and other volunteers will find the strength to continue until it is over.”

Message of Condolence to the Australian People

The Embassy of Israel would like to express its deepest sympathy to our Australian friends who have been caught up in the Victorian bushfires.

The Embassy would like to join in expressing our heartfelt condolence to those who have lost friends, family and homes in this disaster.

We would also like to take the opportunity to note our unreserved admiration for the efforts of emergency services personnel who have been tireless in their efforts. **(Embassy of Israel, Canberra)**

Ballots open as elections for 18th Knesset commence

Early this morning, polling stations opened across Israel, to begin the process of electing the 18th Knesset. Approximately 5.2 million people are eligible to vote, in 9,263 polling stations across the country. The first exit polls are due at 10pm (local Israel time), when most polling stations close. Real results, however, will not be available until 2am, and if the race proves close, not until early tomorrow morning.

The final opinion polls were taken at the end of last week, but most observers today considered that the race remained open, with both Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu and Kadima leader Tzipi Livni predicting victory for their parties. Both leaders have announced their intention of forming a broad national unity coalition if they should emerge as the leader of the largest Knesset faction. Neither, however, would commit to joining a coalition led by the other. Netanyahu expressed absolute confidence that the right-wing bloc would win more seats than the left-wing bloc, but sounded less certain last night regarding whether Likud itself would emerge larger than Kadima. The process of post-election coalition forming has already begun, with both major parties seeking the support of smaller lists. Israel **Channel 10 News** yesterday suggested that Netanyahu has reached an agreement with Labour leader Ehud Barak, guaranteeing him the Defence Ministry in return for his preventing Livni from forming a government. Avigdor Lieberman, whose Yisrael Beiteinu party is expected to win around 18 seats, has said that he is prepared to join a government led by either Netanyahu or Livni.

The election campaign has been an exceptionally quiet one in Israel. Posters and election literature have been notably absent from urban centres during the past weeks. This may partly be explained by the close proximity of the election to the recent military operation in Gaza. It should also be remembered that this is the fifth election campaign in the last decade. But there is also a more substantive element, namely, that many Israelis do not perceive the gaps between the leaders of the major parties to be particularly wide or particularly clear. As a result, there has been a distinct absence of the fervour associated with elections in past decades, when the preferred policy options of the major parties were more clearly at odds with one another, most notably over the issue of territorial concessions and negotiations with the Palestinians.

For the latest analysis, polling and facts & figures on the Israeli election, visit BICOM's Election Centre on our website at www.bicom.org.uk/news/elections

A sinister hatred kept alive when we turn a blind eye

Frank Devine | *The Australian* | 6 February

It is improbable that I could bring myself to stay for long, if at all, in the same room with somebody who had described Jews as "real mother f--king bastards." Apart from this piece of abuse, Maqsood Alsham, an asylum seeker from Bangladesh, has described the Gaza invasion by Israel as a worse atrocity than the Holocaust.

Yet three universities - Sydney, Macquarie and the Sydney University of Technology - continued their support of a conference organised by Maqsood to debate whether Israel should be tried by the International Court of Justice for the invasion.

In an early defence, Maqsood ingenuously whinged: "Is it anything wrong to have a private conversation? This is not my public view."

But to hold and express such views privately or publicly is to put oneself beyond the pale.

The English Catholic schismatic "bishop" Richard Williamson has done that with his dogmatic assertions that "only 200,000 to 300,000 Jews" died under Nazi persecution and none in gas chambers.

Only 200,000 or 300,000 men, women and children murdered for the crime of being Jews! How trivial a transgression!

Williamson reiterated this view on Swedish TV just prior to Pope Benedict's lifting last week the excommunication orders imposed on Williamson and three other "bishops" of the breakaway Society of Pius IX, founded by the French archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in rebellion against some of the conclusions of Vatican Council II.

Not being skilled at reading the minds of popes, I'm inclined to accept the official explanation that Benedict, having responsibility for preserving church unity, seeks to draw the Society of Pius IX back into the Catholic communion. The Pope's personality also makes it plausible that he cancelled the excommunication order, imposed on the four bishops by Paul VI in 1988, out of compassion for the individuals.

But Williamson! Great fools have achieved episcopal rank before, and you don't have to search widely to suspect their contemporary presence. Williamson is a special case, however.

Apart from his attempted trivialisation of the Holocaust, he has called Jews "the enemies of Christ" and claimed that they "aim at world dominion". (He also believes the US government engineered John F. Kennedy's assassination and that women shouldn't attend universities.)

The Pius IX Society superior, "bishop" Bernard Fellay, has told the Pope he has forbidden Williamson to speak out publicly about any historical or political question.

But who would want to listen to such a man speaking out in any circumstances on any subject? Unless, of course, he was able to pass himself off as a bishop and a man now in good standing with the Catholic Church.

At least, living in Sydney, where *The Age* does not home deliver, I am spared the temptation to provide the hospitality of my doorstep to a newspaper that publishes a column (by one David Backman) blaming Israel's "utter inability to transform the Palestinians from enemies into friends" for "the bombs on London's public transport, bombs in bars in Bali and even the loss of the World Trade Centre in New York".

Backman tosses in a loonily non sequitur anecdote about how unpopular young Israeli backpackers are in Nepal because of being "rude, arrogant and arguing over trifling sums of money".

The allegation of arguing over trifling sums of money was, for me, the killer strike: the hate-filled stereotype of the avaricious, grasping Jew.

It brought back an imbedded memory of a long-ago poker game, during which a friend called John, whose surname doesn't matter, and a friend called Wally, whose surname does, battled it out for a pot of about 50 quid: double a journalist's weekly wage at the time. Wally had the cards and, with a joyful whoop, reached out to gather in the pile of coins and notes.

"You bloody Jew Ginsberg sorry Wally," John blurted. It came out in a single sentence. John's face turned scarlet with shame.

The poker game finished after a few desultory hands. It couldn't continue. Though, happily, no friendships were lost, we were all aware of having approached the brink of something unspeakable.

When I was 14, my father took me, to further my education, to a newsreel about Belsen concentration camp. The scenes of bulldozers pushing emaciated bodies into mass graves horrified me but the greatest horror was in the eyes and faces of the survivors, who had been to a place beyond nightmare and hell.

Given to adolescent self-romanticising, I felt, as a non-Jew, guilty about these sights. The guilt has not vanished. Whenever I read, reluctantly, about the Holocaust, I ask myself if I would be brave enough to resist officially sanctioned persecution of my neighbours because of their race.

Not being sure, I feel pain and shame when people such as Maqsood Alsham, David Backman and Richard Williamson get away with their sinister calumnies.

Turkey in the fire

Barry Rubin | *The Moderate Voice* | 9 February

What direction is the Turkish regime heading?

A pessimistic view goes like this: The ruling AK party is pushing toward an Islamist agenda both at home and abroad. It is moving closer to Iran, Syria, and Hamas. In some ways, Turkey might become part of the Iran-led alignment in the region. Anti-American, anti-Western, and anti-Israel feeling is growing. The government is making a sharp break with the past, based on structural changes in the country. It is gradually capturing institutions: buying up or intimidating the media; allied with a rising, more traditionally oriented new business class and village migrants to the city; naming judges; and neutralizing the army.

The hopeful view sounds like this: The Turkish people haven't changed. A lot of this is temporary, problems stemming from friction with the previous U.S. government in Iraq as well as anger at Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip. National interests—hope of getting into the European Union; need for U.S. backing; high levels of trade, tourism, and military cooperation with Israel—will pull the government and country back onto its usual course.

Both courses are still open to Ankara's rulers. But at the moment the more pessimistic analysis seems the likelier outcome. It is true that the key factor is Turkey's people: but will they speak out and do so effectively?

Before considering this, it should be understood that the policy changes in Turkey do not just include criticism of Israel or some highly publicized events. Rather, there is a systematic shift going on. Internationally, the developments include closer relations between Turkey and such countries as Iran, Syria, and Sudan. Internally, the focal point is the AK's introduction of more Islamic or Islamist norms, the placing of its people in key positions in the civil service and social institutions, the rising pressure in daily life for conformity with Islamist-dictated behaviour, and so on.

The intensity of such changes can be seen also in rarely reported details.

Take, for example, the behaviour of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in attacking Israeli President Shimon Peres in an insulting fashion, then walking out of their session in the Davos conference. Erdogan used, in Turkish, a derogatory form of address toward Peres, and then referred to the one-sided confrontation as a new Gallipoli.

Gallipoli was the World War One battle in which the Ottoman Empire defeated a British invasion attempt. To equate this verbal exchange with a bloody battle in which Turks defended their country from invasion was about the most inflammatory patriotic language the prime minister could use to stir Turk passions.

While Turkish officials issue some soothing public statements, emphasizing their opposition to antisemitism, those who know Turkish or are in the country are getting a different picture. Turkish officials are investigating the possibility of initiating war crimes' charges against Israeli leaders as they welcome top Sudanese officials who are engaged in mass murder in their own country.

Educated, modernist, moderate Turks have not wanted to face what is happening in their country and up until recently have been able to believe the AK is a moderate center-right reformist party with a slight pious tinge. This is becoming more difficult to sustain.

Some months ago I sat around a table with a dozen Turkish professors near Istanbul, people who fit the profile of what would be expected to be strongly anti-AK types. Unanimously they agreed the party was no threat.

One of them, added, however that his sister-in-law told him he was crazy and that the government was leading the country into a disastrous transformation. He then told me that their young nanny

had to wear a headscarf and “Islamic-style” clothing, not because she wanted to but because otherwise she might be harassed or even attacked in her neighbourhood. But this was all anecdotal information that could be disregarded in favour of heeding what top AK leaders promised.

For me, the most dangerous sign was that while the AK promised not to pick the hardline Abdullah Gul as president, to occupy the post once held by Kemal Ataturk, before the last election, the moment it won by a big margin it did so any way. Gul made an extremely arrogant speech saying, in essence, we won and can do whatever we want.

Now we are seeing the result of that confidence. Believing it can win any election, knowing that there will not be strong international condemnation or pressure, aware that the political opposition is divided and poorly led, and not too worried about an army intervention, the AK is marching faster and more visibly down the road a more Islamicized Turkey at home and abroad.

The next, local elections will tell the tale. If the AK loses in Istanbul and Izmir then it might become more cautious. If not things are going to get worse, much worse.

Right now, the situation of Turkey’s Jews is perilous. There has been no violence and the government might well prevent that from happening. But the signs are dangerous. The Ankara branch of the AKP put up a terribly antisemitic item as an apparent official statement. It said that Hitler was Jewish and the Holocaust was a plot to force Jews to emigrate to Palestine. It came down only after the newspaper Radikal protested. The branch’s leader denied all knowledge of the article.

I append below a letter from Istanbul by a very good friend of mine, a Turkish Jew who is 100 percent reliable and the most moderate, mild-mannered, apolitical person you can imagine. He writes:

-The crowd demonstrating in front of the Neve Shalom Synagogue after a speech of Erdogan was chanting: “Tell us to die, we (will) die; tell us hit; we (will) hit”. (MY BROTHER HEARD IT)

-A neighbouring Jewish woman who spoke Turkish with a “Jewish” accent was told by the taxi driver I wish I hadn’t picked you up. (A FRIEND OF MINE TOLD ME)

-In two elementary schools 10 yrs old Jewish boys were called “Dirty Jew” by their peers, something unheard of in the last 60 years. (A FRIEND OF MINE TOLD ME)

-The Jewish youth who were supporting assimilation have debates on this topic, now. (MY FATHER SAID THAT)

-Some Muslim customers/clients are telling jokes to Jewish shopkeepers or businesspeople: “You will be butchered, ha ha ha ...!” (A FRIEND OF MINE TOLD IT).

-Jewish soldiers –having their obligatory service- were sent home in order to be protected from the harassment of peers.(A FRIEND OF MINE TOLD IT)

-In the exit of the Neve Shalom Synagogue after a wedding was a signboard “Go away Jews , Down with Israel”... (MY COUSIN SAW IT)

–A day after the “Go away Jews” part was covered but the rest remained.

–Jews are wounded by the words of Erdogan implying they are “guests” not citizens after 500 years in Turkey. (EVERYWHERE)

-They were announcements on the billboards in Istanbul “You cannot be the son of Moses!” After some objection they removed the signs from billboards but put them on the buildings (I SAW IT)

-The police has the power to stop any march in Turkey, only if they want to. They have stopped leftist marches immediately, but let the demonstration outside the Israeli consulate continue

though it had no permit.

-There is anxiety and discomfort among the community from either terrorist groups or individuals who wage violence thinking that they enjoy government support for doing so.

He ends: I personally thank you for your support to the Turkish Jews –hopefully not Jews from Turkey, soon.

On reading this, a non-Jewish Turk from another city wrote me: “This brought tears to my eyes. I feel the pain for a tree dying in the orchard where I spent my childhood.”

As someone who has spent 35 years working on Turkish history and politics; as the first Israeli exchange professor to teach there; and as someone with scores of close friends, I hope that moderate prevails.

Many Turks are horrified by what they are seeing. Some say these concerns are alarmist and exaggerated. It is the Turkish people alone who will decide their direction and future. But the stakes are high.

Not only is their liberty and society in question but also there are wider implications.

For if Turkey cannot sustain itself as a tolerant, secular, moderate republic, what hope is there for any other Muslim-majority country to do so?

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Time for Israel Advocacy 2.0

Amos Kamil | JTA | 8 February

A recent online search of the phrase "Zionism is racism" yielded 1.3 million Web pages. "Israel + apartheid" turned up a cool 231,000 hits. Type the word "Israel" into Facebook or YouTube and more than likely you will be confronted with user-generated content created by people who do not hold pro-Israel views.

Things are not much better over at the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia. Palestinians and their sympathizers have added "al Nakba," an Arabic term meaning "the catastrophe," to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War entry. On Google Earth, sophisticated Palestinian 2.0 advocates have tagged many Israeli towns and cities with their Arabic names. Both Google and Wikipedia - two Internet behemoths - take cover behind editorial neutrality and free speech, remaining unmoved by Jewish community concerns.

In short, our adversaries have gone 2.0 in their battle to delegitimise Israel, and the recent military operation in Gaza is yet another indication of how Palestinian activists are using the Web to manipulate the public affairs aspects of the debate. A Jan. 18 Jerusalem Post article reported that on Facebook, 648,828 users signed up for the STOP Israel's War Crimes in Gaza application. Only 342,892 users installed QassamCount, a pro-Israel application that updates the user's status with current data showing the number of Kassam rockets that have been fired into Israel from Gaza.

Letter-writing campaigns, used with discretion, may actually help to change a particular media outlet's take on a certain issue. But these tactics alone are not sufficient for capturing the hearts and minds of people all over the world who are increasingly going online for news, analysis and discussion.

As more Jews and non-Jews seek out information online, use social networking tools and watch short form videos, we must train Israel advocates to effectively engage these forums. We must garner our communal resources to train and unleash the next generation of storytellers, bloggers

Become a Member

Ensure that the voice of your community is heard by supporting the work of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies.

Join us in the work of strengthening Jewish life.

Contact the Board for more information:

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We're on the Web!

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and social media gurus to tell Israel's full story in compelling ways.

If the rise of the Internet and the decentralization of media have shown us anything, it is that information will not reach people unless it is presented in unique ways that succinctly communicate its point. We need to find innovative ways to tell, share and distribute those stories in a variety of formats, including e-mail, blogs, vlogs, music videos and whatever other platforms emerge in this fast-paced media environment.

It is also clear that we are well outnumbered, which is why a much more concerted effort is needed. Those of us who care about Israel's agenda and how the future narrative will be portrayed need to mobilize our community to man the battle stations from our laptops.

Each day we hear about newspapers and magazines that are either shutting down or laying off record numbers of staff. As far as we are concerned, the writing is on the wall. A few months ago, the Israel Advocacy Initiative - a joint project of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs and the United Jewish Communities - launched a Facebook group to create discussion about online Israel advocacy.

For years we've been using new media to disseminate "Israel beyond the conflict" stories that aim to educate and inspire the Jewish as well as the broader community. Recently we created a Twitter account (twitter.com/IsraelAdvocacy), where we plan to "tweet" about the latest online advocacy methods, Israeli news and other topics related to pro-Israel activism. We've adopted these methods in an effort to digitize our advocacy and frame the discussion online now and in the future.

This is the new frontier in public affairs. It's time to hop aboard.

[Amos Kamil is the director of the Israel Advocacy Initiative]