

Battlefield reality behind ceasefire

Continued from Page 17

lah, the Houthis and the Syrian regime – also have been killed. These include the IRGC's commander in Syria, Razi Mousavi, killed in an airstrike in Damascus shortly after the war began. Iran's senior adviser to Hezbollah, Abbas Nilforoushan, died in the same strike that killed Nasrallah.

This decapitation of Iranian, Syrian, Hezbollah and Hamas leadership reflects the broader beating that Israel – with extensive non-combat assistance from the US – has dealt its regional adversaries.

Syria's army evaporated when Assad fled; its navy was sunk at its moorings by Israeli jets and its air force destroyed on its runways in the days after the regime fell. Hezbollah lost thousands, killed and wounded in its two-month war with Israel in 2024, while expending a significant portion of its missile arsenal, to lesser effect than many analysts (including me) expected before the war.

Hamas started the war with its own extensive rocket arsenal and perhaps 40,000 fighters at its disposal between its own military wing, the al-Qassam Brigades, and allies such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad. At least half these fighters have been killed and others scattered or forced underground.

The Gaza Strip is de-urbanised, depopulated and extensively damaged, whole settlements bombed and bulldozed, and millions of civilians displaced to makeshift camps in horrific conditions. It is claimed up to 50,000 Gazans have been killed in the conflict and many times more wounded.

Large areas of Lebanon – especially in the southern region, in Beirut and in Hezbollah strongholds of the Bekaa Valley – have been extensively damaged in Israeli airstrikes. Syria's cities were battered by more than a decade of war but the final campaign inflicted even further damage.

The exception to this picture is Yemen's Houthi movement. The Houthis entered the war in late 2023 with a campaign against commercial shipping in the Bab el-Mandab Strait, a chokepoint that carried, before the conflict, 13 per cent of total ship traffic. Their stated intent was to pressure Israel and Israel-friendly nations by holding ships and trade routes at risk until a ceasefire was agreed and Israeli troops withdrew from Gaza. Using aerial drones, missiles, uncrewed surface vessels, armed speedboats and helicopters, the Houthis succeeded in reducing shipping through the strait, costing billions of dollars, disrupting supply chains and damaging more than 87 ships while sinking two and capturing one.

Despite two naval taskforces – one US-led and one assembled by the EU – deploying to protect commercial shipping in the strait, along with extensive airstrikes and a blockade against Yemen's port of Hodeidah, the Houthis continue their campaign.

Their reaction to the news of this week's tentative ceasefire, so far, has been to threaten that they will resume their efforts if the deal collapses while in fact persisting

in their attacks. Iran's proxies in Yemen remain defiant even as Iran and the others in its self-styled Axis of Resistance are on the back foot.

For its part, Israel is victorious on the battlefield – and recognition of that, rather than fancy footwork by Western diplomats, probably accounts for the willingness on both sides to negotiate a ceasefire. Indeed, it's possible Israel's main motivation for a ceasefire arose from the combination of clear battlefield victory close to home along with equally clear inability to suppress the Houthis, who continue launching long-range missiles against Tel Aviv.

Benjamin Netanyahu is personally triumphant, albeit facing political and legal challenges.

None of this assuages the pain of Israeli families whose loved ones were massacred in the initial attacks or have been held by Hamas since October 2023. As few as 20 of the roughly 250 hostages taken at the outset of the war may remain alive, though it is almost impossible to say. In Israel, about 980 civilians and an equal number of military personnel have been killed, more than 13,000 wounded and up to a 500,000 displaced from their homes because of ground attacks at the start of the conflict and rocket and missile attacks since then.

Israel also faces difficult decisions, even if the ceasefire is confirmed and broadly holds. Hamas can survive with largely uncontested control over Gazans; there were no significant incidents of anti-Hamas unrest in Gaza at any time during the war. In the displaced persons camps and ruined cities of the Gaza Strip, Hamas maintains political authority.

It also has sufficient military potential – at least 10,000 fighters still at large – to maintain the fight in the form of a guerrilla campaign or terrorist activity. Permanent Israeli occupation of Gaza would face an insurgency, while full Israeli withdrawal risks resurgence of conventional capability on the part of Hamas. And Israeli forces are still heavily committed in Lebanon, the Golan and the West Bank, with no immediate end to these deployments in sight.

All of which is to say that, even if this week's ceasefire does indeed stick, what comes next will be the hardest thing. We can only hope the region's innocent civilian populations – in Israeli, Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian and Yemeni territory – receive some measure of relief, however temporary. Who, if anyone, gets the credit for a ceasefire matters far less than the possibility that one may finally be at hand.

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Released hostages Aviva Siegel (centre left) hugs Raz Ben Amiat at a Tel Aviv rally in 2024; below, hostages' families and supporters gather in favour of the truce on Thursday

GETTY IMAGES, AFP

'VICTORY' SETS UP

Buckling to pressure, Israel's leader has agreed to a truce he will regret



DANIEL PIPES

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas announced on Wednesday (Thursday AEDT) has implications nearly as momentous as the October 7, 2023, massacre that precipitated it.

The deal comes after 15 months of protracted indecision by the government of Israel, during which Jerusalem followed two contradictory policies towards Hamas: destroy the organisation; make a deal with it.

The first policy, victory over

Hamas, clearly appealed more to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. By my informal count, he mentioned "victory" 216 times in 76 discreet statements, from the immediate aftermath of October 7 to lighting the Hanukkah candles three weeks ago.

At times, as in a statement on French television, his sentences amounted to a barrage of victory talk: "Our victory is your victory," he said. "Our victory is the victory of Israel against anti-Semitism. It is the victory of Judeo-Christian civilisation against barbarism. It is the victory of France."

Nor did Netanyahu seek just plain victory. He spoke variously of "absolute victory", "clear victory", "complete victory", "decisive victory", "full victory" and "total victory". Of these formulations, "total victory" led the pack, mentioned 81 times and showcased via a "Total Victory" base-

ball cap during a visit with former president Donald Trump.

Internal Israeli debates confirmed Netanyahu's preference for victory. For example, Netanyahu banged on the table and told off his national security team, according to Israel's Channel 12: "You are weak. You don't know how to run a tough negotiation." An informed source concluded: "He has given up on the hostages."

But, simultaneously, Netanyahu came under enormous pressure to negotiate with Hamas for the release of Israeli hostages and thereby implicitly permit the jihadi organisation to survive. In agreeing to haggle with Hamas, Netanyahu heeded two powerful lobbies, one foreign, one domestic.

Internationally, governments keenly sought a hostage deal because they sympathised with Hamas or they feared a conflagration across the Middle East. Institutions such as the UN and the International Criminal Court manifested the wide hostility towards Israel. Even friendly governments worried that fighting already encompassing Iran, Syria,



Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank, Gaza, Saudi Arabia, the Red Sea, and Yemen would further expand, perhaps dragging in their own forces, with ominous consequences.

Meanwhile, a domestic lobby pressured the government to make the return of hostages the paramount goal. Lobby members emoted, marched and engaged in political theatre, winning public

opinion in the process. Polls consistently showed a huge majority prioritising hostages over victory.

One poll in October found 77 per cent of Israelis saying the "main goal" of the war in Gaza should be to bring the hostages home and 12 per cent saying it must be to topple Hamas. One month later, another poll reported 69 per cent deeming a

hostage deal "more important" and 20 per cent calling to continue the war until victory. Politicians jumped on the bandwagon, Israeli President Isaac Herzog declaring: "There is no greater moral, human, Jewish or Israeli obligation than to bring our sons and daughters back to us." Military leaders legitimised this sentiment. Major General (res) Noam Tibon announced: "The release of all hostages is the supreme mission of the war, before any other mission. And at the top of our priorities." Major General (res) Amos Gilad went further: "No victory is possible over Hamas if it later turns out that not everything possible was done to retrieve them. An exchange is a matter of national security."

Former Israel Defence Forces chief of staff Benny Gantz stated: "The hostages must be returned, even at a very heavy price." IDF spokesman Daniel Hagari added: "We will do everything, everything, to bring all the hostages home" and "We remain committed to one central war objective – the return of the 109 hostages."

Suggesting Israel has forfeited its right to exist is obscene

There is no civil conversation to be had on the idea of a one-state solution



MICHAEL GAWENDA

A few weeks ago a senior executive at one of Australia's great sandstone universities, a person I have known for several decades, asked me whether it was OK to civilly discuss – and even advocate for – a one-state solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Given what had happened at the university where this person works and at other Australian elite universities, this seemed to be a question disconnected from re-

ality. The agreement this week between Israel and Hamas for a three-stage process that if implemented would end the war in Gaza does not change that.

An end to the war is a long way off and a long-term peace agreement of any kind between Israel and the Palestinians remains a hope and a dream, and in this long and bitter conflict hopes and dreams have ended in nightmares.

But the idea, coming from a senior executive at an elite university, that we here in Australia, we should have a civil discussion – in our parliaments, in our universities, in our media – about whether Israel should cease to exist remains astounding.

Have there been civil conversations about Israel and the Palestinians and Zionism at the university where he works? I should have asked him. Civil conversations,

there among the angry, often hate-filled demonstrations, the occupation of university buildings, the encampments, the end-of-Israel slogans, the slogans of Hamas-like triumphalism and the vitriol directed at Jewish students?

Had he, I should have asked, been to the CBD on any Sunday afternoon and witnessed the demonstrations that are ever more hate-filled, more apocalyptic, more uncompromising, so that Jews do not go to the CBD on Sundays? If he had witnessed such a demonstration, did he wonder whether his question about a civil conversation about Israel and the Palestinians and Zionism could do anything more than inflame the demonstrators? That they would do anything else than treat the question with contempt?

Then there are the Jews. Australian Jews, I mean. Were they to be included in this civil conversation about a one-state solution for the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians?

There are increasing numbers of people on the left – the Greens

and Jewish anti-Zionists among them – who do not believe a civil conversation with Jews who do not renounce Israel and Zionism is possible or even desirable. These Jews are, after all, supporters of genocide and white supremacy and colonialism.

To be fair, I believe that the senior university executive who asked me the question about whether a civil conversation was possible about a one-state solution – one state from the river to the sea, I assume he meant – is not a supporter of the concept of good and bad Jews.

The civil conversation he had in mind would not exclude Jews like me who feel a deep connection – a connection approaching love – with Israel despite its flaws and darknesses, and despite Benjamin Netanyahu and the racists and Jewish supremacists who are senior ministers in Netanyahu's government. But still, given all that has happened since October 7, 2023, at the university he and the executive team run, given the weekly CBD demonstrations,

given the social media rivers of hate against Jews and Israel and Zionists, given the vandalised Jewish homes and businesses, the synagogue that was burnt and the defacement of other synagogues, given all that, what sort of civil conversation does he imagine is possible about whether Israel should cease to exist? Even if Jews like me are not excluded from the conversation?

For that is the essence of his question: given Israel's history, the way it was established, the way the Palestinians were dispossessed, the way Zionism was a settler-colonial ideology, a white supremacist ideology and given what Israel has done in Gaza, isn't Israel a failed state that should never have been born?

And isn't it time to discuss – civilly, of course – what sort of state should replace it?

It is a dark and threatening question for most Jews, difficult to answer in a civil way given that it implies the possibility that Israel has no right any longer – if it ever did – to exist. It remains a dark and threatening question despite what has happened this week.

And of course it is a question that has no salience in Israel or among Palestinians, the vast majority of whom, in their post-October 7 world, see the conflict as a zero-sum game with no end to it except victory for their side.

That has not changed with this

week's developments. How is it, then, that a senior executive at one of Australia's elite universities, given all that has taken place at his university, thinks a civil conversation, about whether the erasure of Israel is a good or bad thing, is worth having? What would be the point except to legitimise, make kosher, the question of whether Israel should be erased?

Still, I think it was remiss of me not to answer the question – I basically obfuscated, said it was a complex question that required a certain amount of unpacking. And that we should discuss it further. Blah blah blah.

Despite everything, the question from the senior university executive has been on my mind ever since he asked it. And it has been more urgently on my mind this week.

I have written scores of articles since October 7, 2023 – many published in this paper – but I have not written about the war in Gaza, with its unspeakable horrors.

I have written about the state of the world for diaspora Jews, Australian Jews in particular.

I have written a lot about journalism and the way journalism has been compromised by an abandonment of basic principles – that journalists should be fair and accurate and never activists for a cause.

I have written about the ways things that would once have been unthinkable have become normalised. I have written about the blatant and increasingly virulent hostility towards Jews and the demonisation of Israel, which for many leftists including significant members of the Labor Party has become the incarnation of colonial, racist evil.

I have written about the targeting on social media of artists and writers and academics who are now routinely referred to as demonic supporters and promoters of the Israeli genocide.



A Jewish man walks past a Palestinian woman in Jerusalem

AFP

And I have written about the abject failure of the Albanese govern-

ment and the public institutions whose mission it is to combat anti-Semitism, to address Jewish vulnerability and call out and stamp out anti-Jewish violence.

None of this, not a single article, was published in The Age, the newspaper I edited for seven years. The paper where I worked for most of my half-century in journalism. The paper is not up for a civil conversation with me, not about the crisis in journalism, not about the way government and institutions have failed to respond to Jew hatred.



REUTERS, AFP

Israeli officers remove activists blocking a road during a protest against the ceasefire deal with Hamas; below, Palestinians in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip celebrate the truce

HAMAS' NEXT WAR

Torn between his preference and these dual pressures, Netanyahu prevaricated for more than 15 months between victory and hostages. He ordered a military assault on Gaza that much reduced Hamas's capabilities even as he signed a partial ceasefire deal with it. He ordered the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran while insisting that hostages remained his top concern.

Not reaching a decision allowed Netanyahu to postpone fraught choices and prevarication staved off a governing coalition collapse. In the end, however, he spurned his preference for victory in favour of the hostages and a decisive ceasefire. The complex, three-phase agreement includes many moving parts and extremely detailed provisions, such as how many and what kind of Palestinians are to be exchanged for what kind of hostage.

In outline, it calls for the release of 33 hostages in exchange for the release of more than 1000 Palestinians, including murderers, now in Israeli prisons; the withdrawal of Israeli troops from parts of

Gaza; an increase in aid to Gaza; the return of Gazans in most of Gaza; and the opening of a border crossing to Egypt. Further, it requires that negotiations resume within 16 days of signing to work on the release of all remaining 65 or so hostages in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners released, the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, and a permanent end of hostilities.

In brief, as Israel Hayom's senior diplomatic and White House correspondent Ariel Kahana puts it, "Israel is, with its own hands, helping its enemy to prepare to wage war." Netanyahu obviously knows this, if only because prior exchanges have led to disaster, so why did he agree to an agreement that his own coalition partner Itamar Ben-Gvir called "horrific"?

Because he fears Trump. The president-elect stated on January 7 that "all hell will break out" in the Middle East if Hamas did not release the hostages it held. That seemed to mean, as vice-president-elect JD Vance interpreted it, pressure on Hamas: "It's very clear that President Trump threatening



Hamas and making it clear that there is going to be hell to pay."

But no. Trump dispatched private citizen but future presidential envoy Steve Witcoff to read Netanyahu the riot act. A report in Ha'aretz tells how Witcoff compelled Netanyahu to break the Sabbath for a meeting in which he was forced "to accept a plan that (he) had repeatedly rejected over the past half year."

This new, aggressive approach, Ran Porat of Monash University says, obliged Netanyahu "to recalculate his positions, seeking to appease Trump".

In an unexpected irony, Sanam Vakil of Chatham House notes "the Biden administration proved unwilling to exert adequate pressure over Israel's leadership" but Trump did. Netanyahu stood up to timid President Joe Biden but ac-

quiesced to cowboy Trump. Why did Trump push so hard for a deal? One can only speculate but I believe him inspired by the events of January 20, 1981, when an aeroplane carrying all American hostages took off from Tehran moments after Ronald Reagan was sworn in as president, leading to an ebullient and triumphal inauguration. Trump demanded a done deal before taking office on Monday to win a like glory for himself. Predictably, he lavishly praised on the "EPIC ceasefire agreement", describing himself as "thrilled American and Israeli hostages will be returning home".

He ignored, of course, the grievous future costs of his momentary success. The deal releases many hundreds of hardened Islamist criminals, now free to return to their murderous ways. It nearly assures continued Hamas rule in Gaza. It boosts Islamist morale worldwide. It humiliates the West's foremost Middle Eastern ally. It also confirms Trump's inconstant, unreliable and ego-driven foreign policy.

Netanyahu will be not the last

US ally humiliated by self-centred presidential demands.

Putting this error in the context of George W. Bush's over-ambition ("Mission accomplished"), Barack Obama's shallow defeatism ("Leading from behind") and Biden's geriatric passivity (the Afghanistan rout) clarifies the shambles of US foreign policy over the past quarter-century.

This leads to an inescapable conclusion: allies such as Australia must reduce their dependence on Washington. This may well be a good thing. Decreased reliance on American leadership concentrates the mind, exercises unused talents and encourages a seriousness of purpose. Thus does an incompetent US, as symbolised by the "horrific" Hamas-Israel ceasefire, push free countries more actively to determine their own futures.

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MAX MASON-HUBERS/NEWSWIRE

Pro-Palestine encampment at University of Sydney in 2024

The last time The Age published me was a month or so before October 7 when it ran an extract from my book, *My Life as a Jew*. The book was published three days before October 7.

Former colleagues at The Age came to the launch. Journalists from across the media came to the launch - I had, after all, been a journalist for a long time.

Since then, some of my former colleagues who came to the launch of my book and celebrated with me have asked me questions like the one the university executive

asked: what's my position on the Gaza war? How can the deaths of so many civilians be justified? Can Israel be a democracy and a Jewish state, and if not what's the alternative? These questions are asked by former colleagues and friends who are not anti-Zionists and who do not accuse Israel of being a genocidal state rooted in an evil racist ideology.

Former colleagues and friends who believe these things do not ask me these questions, they simply end our friendship.

They are fair questions, heart-

felt questions, even though in the greater scheme of things why should it matter so much to friends and former colleagues what I think about these things?

It often feels like it matters in large part because they want me to say publicly that I have not become hard-hearted, that I see and feel heartbreak at the suffering of the people of Gaza, that I am no supporter of Netanyahu and his fascist ministers who are creating hell for Palestinians on the West Bank.

There are Jewish journalists who have answered these sorts of questions, "spoken out" against the war in Gaza, expressed their pain at the destruction and death visited upon Gazans, and who have declared that what is being done by Israel is "not done in my name" and have been awarded for their cry of pain with major journalism awards.

I have written none of these things. I have answered none of the heartfelt questions asked by my former colleagues and my friends, not publicly anyway.

In an extract in Pearls and Irritations from his recently published memoir, Robert Manne, one of Australia's great public intellectuals, writing about our disagreement in the 1980s about whether Australia should conduct war crimes trials of people who had settled in Australia after World War II and were accused of committing serious crimes during the

Holocaust, refers to me as "the journalist Michael Gawenda, a current defender of Israel's behaviour in Gaza".

I was puzzled by this at first, this reference in passing, to my supposed defence of Israel's "behaviour" in Gaza. How was it at all relevant to our long-ago disagreement about the war crimes trials?

And then I realised Manne was trying to be ironic. Gawenda was for war crimes trials for old Nazis but now he defends the war crimes being perpetrated by the Israelis.

I don't think I have defended Israel's behaviour in Gaza but the point is that Manne assumes this about me and he makes this assumption because I have not - unlike him and other people like him - written articles and made speeches at rallies that excoriate Israel and express a powerful disillusionment with the whole Zionist project.

I don't think I have defended Israel's behaviour in Gaza but the thing is, I am not disillusioned with the whole Zionist project. My attachment to Israel, my concern for its people, is undiminished. It remains for me, a miracle, a deeply flawed miracle, but a miracle still.

Israel is not a genocidal state. The suggestion is obscene. And worse than that. The idea that Israel has forfeited its right to exist - if it ever had such a right - is also obscene. And worse than that.

That these accusations are now

made, and these judgments are now delivered by substantial sections of the left, including much of the Labor Party left, remains shocking to me.

So what is my answer - what should my answer have been to the question asked by that senior executive at one of our elite universities: Is it OK to have a - civil, of course - discussion about a one-state solution? What is my answer in light of the agreement between Israel and Hamas to free some hostages in exchange for the release of many more prisoners - some of them serving life sentences - held in Israeli jails?

One state from the river to the sea, a discussion about whether the slogan "From the river to the sea" is a perfectly OK slogan for the protesters at our universities and on the streets of our cities or chant? A civil discussion about that? How does the senior university executive imagine that on his campus, with some of his academics out there standing shoulder to shoulder with the protesters, with Jewish students feeling unsafe on campus, there could be a civil discussion about whether Israel should survive as a Jewish state?

Or does he imagine that as a result of the agreement this week, all these protests will end, all the activist academics will fall silent and go back to teaching or research, all the chants of "From the river to the sea" will change to a chant for

peace? There is a world in which such a discussion of "one state" could happen, but it is not the world in which we are living, the world we have been living in since October 7, 2023.

It is not even the world in which there is some hope that the war in Gaza might indeed end.

Nor in this world - even now - do I have answers to the heartfelt questions asked of me by some of my former colleagues and even some of my friends. What I have are half-answers because what I think and feel is contradictory and fragmented and that, inevitably, would be misunderstood.

Here, in Australia, have we crossed some sort of line where hostility towards Jews is part of a reality with which we have to live? In which being a supporter of Israel is to be an evil Zionist, an advocate for genocide?

I would say all this to the university executive if he asked me his question now.

Then I would suggest that there is much to be done at our universities and by our governments and our institutions that matters more than whether we should have civil discussions about whether Palestine should be free, from the river to the sea.

Michael Gawenda is the former editor-in-chief of The Age and is the author of My Life as a Jew (Scribe, 2023).

The corrupt PA isn't ready to rule

PM should demand reform before he supports statehood



GEMMA TOGNINI

Federal Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus is in Israel. Let's face it, this is a "five minutes to the election and time is running out" trip that reeks of politics rather than conviction.

The Attorney-General's trip landed in the same week in which a ceasefire deal was agreed to. As I write, the release of hostages is imminent. We don't know how many are alive or how many have been executed by the monsters in Gaza's terror tunnels. Who knows if the tiny Bibas brothers will come back in coffins. Could anyone who survives this horror ever hope to really live again?

Moreover, how disgusting, what a failure of the international community that it did not care enough about these hostages to put pressure on Qatar, Turkey and the usual suspects to force Hamas to let them go. Instead, we stood by as they were executed in cold blood, deep in terror tunnels built over decades and funded by international aid money.

This week I dived down a rabbit hole, reading, digging, questioning. And I've come to what now feels like an obvious conclusion. Australia's push to recognise a Palestinian state now is nothing but a con job by the government on voters and I'm here to tell you why.

Anthony Albanese and Penny Wong abandoned Israel when it needed us most. They have merrily trashed our relationship with the only democracy in the Middle East. And they are attempting to accelerate the recognition of statehood for the Palestinian territories.

And herein lies the con. The language, the narrative, the picture that the Prime Minister and his Foreign Minister have been attempting to paint for Australians to validate their radical policy shift is one that positions the Palestinian Authority as being ready. Ready for recognition, able to function as a working democracy just as Australia functions, just as Israel does. Rule of law. Equality. If a woman wants to wear a bikini to the beach, she can go right ahead. You get the drift.

The government wants Australians to believe the Palestinian Authority is like a house that has been beautifully renovated and is ready to go. Just move on in, all the work's been done. Wrong; it remains the ultimate fixer-upper.

The most powerful proof of this is something I found down the rabbit hole and it has been hidden in plain sight but you won't hear Albanese or Wong talk about this. That would give the game away. The Palestinian Authority, the same PA they think should be granted legitimacy, is actually paying off the Hamas terrorists who took part in the depraved slaughter of October 7, 2023. You heard me.

Many of you will be aware of the so-called pay-to-slay policy under which financial rewards are provided to the families of Palestinians who commit acts of violence against Israeli civilians. Known as the Martyrs Fund, it was started by the Palestine Liberation Organisation in the 1960s. It was and remains a financial safety net for terrorists. Don't believe me? Under the (now) Palestinian Authority's Prisoners and Released Prisoners Law, the more Israelis killed, the longer the jail time, the greater the financial payment - for life.

That's the history, now for the present. The same PA to which Wong and Albanese have hitched Australia's cart has not so quietly extended the pay-for-slay program to the families of the October 7 Hamas terrorists.

Just pause and process that for a moment. As The Wall Street Journal editorialised almost a year ago to the day, "Palestinian Authority law requires the October 7 terrorists to be compensated financially for a massacre well done".

The PA in its own suite of various communications (all quite readily available for those who fancy a look for

themselves) doesn't differentiate between Hamas October 7 terrorists and civilians killed in the course of the war.

Of course, what this means is that you and I, and taxpayers from all over Europe and North America, will help pay the bill.

And our government thinks the PA is ready and deserving of being legitimised. The same PA that has overseen the chaos, radicalisation, slaughter and subjugation of its own people; hasn't held an election in 20 years; failed to control the spread of Hamas, which by all reports is preparing to rebuild as soon as the ceasefire kicks in.

There are no rights for minorities (memo to Queers for Palestine, there are very few living queers in Palestine), and as a woman in the West Bank? Your testimony in court legally is worth only half that of men, and that is just the beginning.

As for how they do politics, just this week Fatah activists threatened to break the legs of political activist Mustafa Barghouti, a medical doctor born in East Jerusalem who was a former presidential candidate. His crime? Criticising the PA and calling for fresh elections.

I met Barghouti last year in Ramallah and he spoke passionately about a one-state solution (yes, one state). He dares to call for democracy and is threatened with abhorrent violence, and this is the norm under the PA.

Federal Labor has backed these chaos-mongers to run Gaza after the war and acts as if statehood is some kind of cure-all. This is the con. This is the great fraud Albanese and Wong are attempting to commit against the Australian people.

They say that statehood now is not only the right thing to do, it's the fair thing to do. The PA is ready. What a lie. And what a disgrace because what it also powerfully demonstrates is that



Dreyfus in Israel

neither Albanese nor Wong actually cares about quality of life for ordinary Gazans, for people in the West Bank, for minorities, women or the children whose education by UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is poisoned by a curriculum that fuels radicalisation and hatred of Jews. They don't care if anything materially changes or not. If quality of life improves. If democracy lives or dies.

Every Israeli I have met dreams of a two-state solution, but few have confidence there is a genuine partner for peace. As the ceasefire was announced, senior Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya responded by praising the October 7 massacre as a major achievement that would be taught with pride to future generations of Palestinians. He went on to say that the next step is to rid Jerusalem of all Jews.

These are public statements being made before the world, and our government doesn't want anyone to know it. This ceasefire deal doesn't even require Hamas to be dismantled.

If this government cared about more than ideology it would demand accountability. You want statehood? Full and equal rights for minorities. Reform pay-for-slay so that it is a true social safety net, not a terrorist incentive scheme.

Hold free and fair elections. Give women the same rights and agency that women in Australia enjoy.

Demand it. Make it clear. Create a pathway and do not deviate. Anything less is simply rewarding a corrupt, violent, dysfunctional regime that has never given anyone cause to believe it is a genuine partner in the journey towards peaceful coexistence.

In his highly polished "I'll have a buck each way, thanks" media statement about his trip to Israel, Dreyfus referenced HV "Doc" Evatt, the Labor attorney-general and High Court justice who steered Australia's vote at the UN in support of the creation of the state of Israel. The chutzpah of it. Labor's foreign policy position on Israel has been praised by Hamas. I wonder what Evatt would have said about that.